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Edge examines the past, present and future of handheld gaming

Tokyo Game Show 2001

Previewed: Maximo, Eternal Darkness, Soul Calibur 2, Civilisation III

Reviewed: Advance Wars, Ico, Burnout, Headhunter

pure gaming?

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For the second consecutive issue, a Game Boy Advance title receives one of the highest ratings in **Edge**'s Testscreen section. Following *Mario Kart Advance* comes *Advance Wars* (sadly now postponed in Europe until 2002 following recent events). As befits **Edge**'s 9 out of 10 scores, these titles aren't just good, they're outstanding – pure, shining examples of handheld gaming: compact, self-contained, straightforward but not lacking in depth or variety.

In this respect, they're enough to make titles on other systems hang their heads in shame. It's reminiscent of the days when coders had to shoehorn their product into just 64K and 16 colours. The creative distillation process serves to remove the flab and extraneous fluff that bedevils titles on bigger consoles, free to languish on multi-Gigabyte DVDs. Unnecessary stats, overblown storylines, excruciating load times, self-indulgent dialogue, lengthy intro FMV, cut-scenes that-you-just-can't-damn-well-bypass… Too many developers seem to confuse complexity with depth.

But because cartridge memory is at a premium and the controls somewhat limited, the GBA treats us to software that cuts straight to the heart of gameplay – and does it quickly. Play is immediate and satisfying.

The little handheld, while obviously far from perfect, is fast becoming a must-have machine. The increasingly bewildering release schedule has tick marks next to every genre category: racing games, puzzlers, adventures, beat 'em ups, platformers, flight sims, FPSs… you name it, it's there. Developers are rushing to GBA like lemmings to the cliff edge, which is great news for gamers in terms of sheer choice.

The only danger is that GBA – and other handheld devices for that matter – are increasingly looking like depositories for back-catalogue cash-ins. And while the *Dooms* and *Sonics* and *Tekkens* are welcome additions, there's a worry that titles even vaguely popular on the 8 and 16bit systems might rear their aged heads at the expense of anything vaguely original.

But, for the time being, it's full steam ahead. And anyone who's successfully put off buying a GBA must now surely be questioning their resolve – particularly if the guy who installed that frontlight (see Out There, page 22) starts shipping DIY kits…



Features





















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ABC
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Editorial
Future Publishing
30 Monmouth Street
Bath, BANES BA1 2BW
Telephone: 01225 442 244
Editorial fax: 01225 732 275
Email: edge@futurenet.co.uk
Edge Web site: www.edge-online.com

People on Edge
Steve Jarratt group senior editor
João Sanches deputy editor
Dan Goodleff production editor
David McCarthy news editor
Ste Curran reviews editor
Mark Walbank features editor
Christophe Kagotani Tokyo bureau
Terry Stokes art editor
Darren Phillips deputy art editor

Display, recruitment and classified advertising contacts
Anne Green senior advertising manager
anne.green@futurenet.co.uk
Claire Hawkins advertising manager
claire.hawkins@futurenet.co.uk

Phil Jones senior sales executive
phil.jones@futurenet.co.uk
Advertising phone: 01225 732218

Subscriptions
Future Publishing Ltd
FREEPOST BS4900, Somerton TA11 6BR
Telephone customer services: 01458 271112
Telephone customer order line: 01458 271112
Fax: 01225 822523
Email: subs@futurenet.co.uk

Future Publishing people
Diane Ross senior production coordinator
Rose Rudd production manager
Production fax 01225 732293
Steve Michaels ad design manager
Mike Thorne commercial team buyer
Rachel Spurrier pre-press coordinator
Ian Miller group art editor
James Binns publisher
David Maher-Roberts group publishing direct
Colin Morrison managing director
Greg Ingham chief executive

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the 'it's gonna be all white' issue







Prescreen











Regulars

Testscreen

Production of Edge
Hardware: Power Macintosh G3, G4
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"Human beings have neither the aural nor the psychological capacity to withstand the awesome power of God's true voice. Were you to hear it, your mind would cave in and your heart would explode within your chest. We went through five Adams before we figured that out"

frontend

News and views from e-entertainment's cutting edge



Microsoft consumed the floorspace to push its miraculous Xbox, but attendees reacted coolly to the titles on offer



Sega storms Tokyo Game Show

Despite the cancellation of the Spring event, Autumn TGS boasts the strongest software line-up in recent years and is dominated by talk of Sega's cross platform strategy

This year's Autumn Tokyo Game Show was the last to take place as a biannual event. The move to cancel the Spring TGS can't have come as a shock to anyone, given the poor attendances that marred the event in recent years. What was surprising is that this year's show, which took place at the Makuhari Messe exhibition centre on October 12-14, was one of the strongest in recent years. Sega returned after a two-year absence, Microsoft monopolised significant floor space, and Sony demonstrated perhaps the strongest line-up of software since the launch of PlayStation2. And in spite of the continued depressed state of the Japanese videogame market, audience turnout was in excess of previous events.

The decision to cancel the Spring show was inevitable in light of the high cost of exhibiting and the raft of competing events that have conspired to undermine recent exhibitions. With the likes of Square bypassing the TGS to unveil *Final Fantasy X* at the Jump Festa, and Sega, SCEI and Nintendo all choosing to demonstrate their wares at their own exhibitions, TGS has suffered from a steady decline in importance, which has been compounded by difficult market conditions.



"Tetsu Kayama, the company's COO, declared that it is Sega's intent to become the top independent publisher by March 2004"

Wandering round the streets of Akihabara prior to the event proved particularly revealing, with the majority of specialist videogame retailers reducing stock size, and several closing down. Nevertheless, after a slow start, the overall attendance over three days of 129,626 visitors, was an improvement over the 118,080 that attended in the Spring, and a significant cosplay contingent added a welcome sense of occasion. And although fewer companies were exhibiting than last year, the overall quality of the software was much higher, suggesting that – Japanese economy aside – there is scope for the market to recover in time for TGS 2002.

Sega's strategy

At the show itself, the big story was undoubtedly Sega's cross platform development strategy. While Microsoft might have had the floor space, Sega stole the show with a well-timed announcement on the first day of the conference, outlining the latest details in the company's assault on cross platform development.

Tetsu Kayama, the company's COO, declared that it is Sega's intent to become the top independent publisher by March 2004, as well as announcing a number of key partnerships. Enix will be using Sega's Isao online infrastructure, for example, while publishing agreements are already in place with THQ in the US, and SCEE and Infogrames in Europe.

The company also had the most impressive stand of the show, with by far the most consistent software line-up. In particular, an impressive roster of Xbox titles gave the impression that its teams have got to grips with Xbox hardware far better than anyone else – Microsoft included. *Jet Set Radio* and *Gun Valkyrie* continue to impress, while Wow Entertainment's *Major League Baseball 3* went down well with Japanese gamers. Smilebit's *Panzer Dragoon* video gave little away except for the logo, but it's an enticing prospect. Although not concerning Xbox proper, it was also





Aside from showcasing aesthetic crowd-pleasers like *Halo* and *Dead or Alive 3*, Microsoft also stage-tested Xbox's sonic capabilities by running demos of realtime 5.1 channel generation



The shape of things to come: Xbox peripherals (left), the hugely popular *Train Simulator Real* (below) and Capcom's superlative PS2 line-up (right)

















From top to bottom, the show highlights on the Xbox (*Gun Valkyrie* and *Jet Set Radio*), PS2 (*Kengo 2* and *Maximo*) and GC (*Phantasy Star Online* and *Sonic*). *Phantasy Star Online* players who recognise the difficulty in switching between keyboard and joypad on the DC version may welcome Ascii's GameCube solution, an unsubtle amalgam of both devices

revealed that Sega is at work on an arcade board based on the Xbox development architecture. There are no firm details concerning either the system specifications, or the titles that will be produced for it, but it is anticipated that the board will feature increased RAM in place of an in-built hard drive. AM2 is said to be developing a number of titles for the board, including *OutRun 2* and *Virtua Cop 3*.

Software highlights

Sega titles in development for GameCube appeared to be fewer than for Xbox. Contrary to expectations, Yu Suzuki didn't announce a title for the platform, and Amusement Vision didn't reveal its third GameCube title, but Sonic Team's Yuji Naka was on hand to endorse Sega's commitment to the hardware. As well as demonstrating the linkup between the Game Boy Advance and GameCube versions of his team's Sonic titles, he also showed off a GameCube controller/keyboard hybrid, for use with *Phantasy Star Online*. The real highlight, though, was *Virtua Fighter 4* on PlayStation2. Intended for a January 30 release, an incredible conversion put paid to any carping about the idiosyncratic architecture of PlayStation2, and looks likely to see off any competition from Namco's *Tekken 4*. Likewise, UGA's *Rez*, demonstrated on stage by Tetsuya Mizuguchi, proved to be one of the leading titles on any platform.

Finally, in a bid to turn its illustrious back catalogue into an ongoing revenue stream, Sega proudly announced a 'vintage classic' series. The first title in the line-up will be *Shining Soul* for the GBA, but further conversions of the company's Mega Drive, Saturn and Dreamcast titles were also mooted – including *Streets of Rage* and *NiGHTS*.

If anything, Sega's presentation demonstrated the company's new role as a key player in the competition between diverse hardware manufacturers. It's clear that Sony, Nintendo and Microsoft all perceive Sega content to be an indispensable part of their strategies, underlining the company's resurgence since abandoning hardware production.



Bill Gates on stage

As if to emphasise this fact, and indeed the event itself, Bill Gates himself turned up on the last day of the show, putting in an unscheduled visit to the Sega stand, where he was joined on stage by all of the various studio heads – including those who have ye[t] to come out and announce a title for Xbox. But aside from the Sega titles, and despite its imposing presence taking up much of the third exhibition hall, Microsoft's offering met a mixed reception from show-goers.

There were a number of remarkable titles on display, with *Dead or Alive 3* continuing to look slick and polished, and *Halo* in particular standing out in terms of technical excellence. The problem, though, was that attendees appeared indifferent to the strengths of the latter title, and a numbe[r] of less accomplished games generated a similar apathetic response. Konami's *Silent Hill 2*, for example, was indistinguishable from the PlayStation2 version, while *Nezmix*

> "The real highlight was *Virtua Fighter 4*. Slated for a January 30 release, an incredible conversion put paid to any carping about idiosyncratic architecture on the PlayStation2"







Thirdparty developers showed the bigger players how it should be done, with a rack of forward-looking titles that got everyone clamouring for a playtest







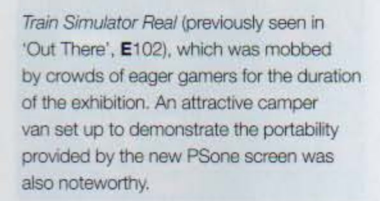
Double STEAL and *Zan Kabuki* elicited varying reactions from the audience. Aside from airing Xbox software, Microsoft was also keen to show off the technical potential of its hardware, particularly its audio capacity, which was highlighted by running demos of realtime 5.1 channel generation.

With the Japanese launch of the console not scheduled until February 22 next year, Microsoft must feel like there's still time to convince the Japanese public of the merits of the Xbox. But with PlayStation2 an increasingly entrenched incumbent, it still looks like the apathy of the Japanese consumer could be a stumbling block in the way of the company's domination of the videogame market.

Thirdparty showtime

Indeed so ensconced is SCEI as the major videogame hardware manufacturer, that the rather flat showing compared with previous years was offset by the performance of thirdparty developers. An easily overlooked stand, lost in one of the corners of the main hall, did little to heighten anticipation for SCEI's software line-up, and poor quality AV connections compounded the underwhelming first impressions.

But even aside from these presentation snarl-ups, the games on show were a mixed bag. *Jak and Daxter* didn't go down too well with attendees, although *Formula One 2001*, *Ico*, *Shake it Bravoes!* and *Legaia Duel Saga* had a reasonable enough reception. By far the most popular title was



Train Simulator Real (previously seen in 'Out There', **E**102), which was mobbed by crowds of eager gamers for the duration of the exhibition. An attractive camper van set up to demonstrate the portability provided by the new PSone screen was also noteworthy.

PS2 comes of age

But given SCEI's slightly laissez-faire approach, it was really the strength of the other exhibitors that contributed to the sense that PlayStation2 is finally coming of age. While traditionally strong publishers Namco and Konami had an underwhelming show, others, such as Capcom and Enix, demonstrated a creative resurgence.

Namco's stand had little to offer, apart from existing titles such as *Moto GP2* and *Xenosaga*. Konami's contribution was more dispiriting, predominantly consisting of sequels and updates, and a substantial Bemani roster that did little except highlight the creative stagnancy currently afflicting the genre. *Silent Hill 2* and *Metal Gear Solid 2* did show plenty of promise, but again, attendees seemed nonplussed. So it was left to *Gradius Generations* on the GBA to provide any hint of what the publisher is really capable of, although even here there was little else of note.

Similarly, Square's stand reflected the company's current difficulties. Sales of *Final Fantasy X* have been disappointing in light of a sizeable development spend, and the team behind the popular PlayStation2 baseball game, *Gekikukan Pro Yakyu*, has departed for Namco's arcade division. Consequently, a low key presentation emphasised the company's PlayOnline and WonderSwan endeavours.

But these disappointments were offset by the strong performances of other publishers. Capcom's PlayStation2 cel-shaded racer *Auto Modellista*, for instance, was one of the stand-out titles, coming from the same team that developed *PowerStone*. Conveying an excellent sense of speed and an invigorating aesthetic style, it also appeared to feature online components.

Aside from this, a playable *Maximo* demo garnered a substantial amount of attention, and *Onimusha 2* generated lengthy queues, with *Breath of Fire III* and *Street Fighter Zero 3* also ported to the GBA. The GameCube incarnation of *Biohazard* was also heavily promoted, with a range of merchandise to support the video footage that was also on display. Elsewhere, Enix was another company undergoing a renaissance, with *Star Ocean 3* generating a significant impact.

Finally, companies such as Genki, Koei and From Software rounded off the impression of an industry that seems determined to overcome harsh commercial realities by means of renewed creativity, from titles such as *Kengo 2* and *Dynasty Warriors 3* on PS2 to *Murakumo* and *Gaia Blade* on Xbox. In light of the cancellation of the Spring show, such a strong line-up was a welcome surprise.

Just some of the supporting merchandise on display for the upcoming GameCube version of *Biohazard*





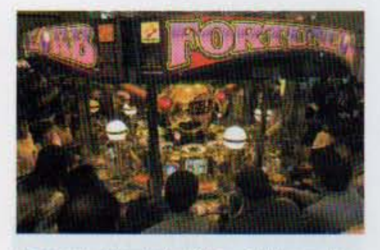
Sega's contingent take to the stage. But while COO Tetsu Kayama (middle) announced a number of key partnerships with industry heavyweights, Yu Suzuki (second from right) failed to unveil the expected raft of Sega GC titles

JAMMA stuck in a rut

Sega continues its dominance over the coin-op sector, although given the overall poor showing at Tokyo the worth of that isn't entirely clear







In general, attempts to distinguish the arcade experience from that provided by home consoles was characterised by one-trick novelties and SNES-era graphics. Only Sega seemed come out of the show with any credit, owing to a strong line up and the growing success of its memory card endeavours

This year's JAMMA coin-op expo, which took place in central Tokyo from September 20-22, once again focused attention on an industry that finds itself in the doldrums. Although a year has passed since JAMMA president Yoshihito Kikahara called for increased ingenuity in the face of growing mobile phone usage and a changing audience demographic, the showfloor remained ample testament to the inability of coin-op manufacturers to come up with a convincing alternative to home-console gaming.

There were few major product announcements, and the performance of the major coin-op developers who turned up was almost universally poor. The one positive note to be sounded was Sega's continued success, but it remains to be seen whether market dominance by a single player will be enough to resurrect the fortunes of the arcade gaming sector.

Treasure strikes gold

Of the few standout titles that were on display, *Ikaruga*, running on Sega's Naomi hardware, was perhaps the most exciting – indeed, it will have come as no surprise to Treasure-heads that the spiritual successor to the formidably priced *Radiant Silvergun* looks like an exceptional prospect. Ostensibly a fairly typical shoot 'em up consisting of five stages, once again Treasure has proved that it is possible to inject a slightly moribund genre with a shot of originality. The main innovation, apart from some sublime design, is to enable players to switch between two different variants of their onscreen vessel. Each incarnation is invulnerable to particular enemies, whose attacks can be used to power up guided missiles.



Namco surprisingly chose not to demonstrate the sequel to *Soul Calibur*. Consequently, there were few titles that stood out on the company's System 246 hardware, in contrast with Sega's Naomi board







Also running on Naomi hardware were the Sega titles *Initial D Arcade Stage* and *The King Of Route 66*. The former, developed by Sega Rosso, is a racing game based on a popular anime licence, and features three circuits and compatibility with Sega's memory card system. *Route 66* is a sequel to AM2's *18 Wheeler*, offering around 16 stages and a more mission-based structure.

But away from the massively successful Naomi board, things were less impressive. Namco wasn't showing off the forthcoming sequel to *Soul Calibur*, instead opting to focus on *Smash Court Tennis* and *Wangan Midnight*, both running on the company's PlayStation2-based System 246 architecture. While *Smash Court Tennis* has the potential to become a worthy competitor to *Sega's Virtua Tennis 2* – owing to a similarly intuitive input system – *Wangan Midnight* suffered from comparison to both *Initial D* and Genki's *Shutoko Battle*. Based on a less popular anime franchise, and boasting imprecise handling, visually it resembles a PSone title.

Bemani falls out of step

Likewise, Konami's offering was unfavourably compared to that of Sega, compounding problems presented by the saturation of the Bemani market and the immaturity of the motion-capture technology utilised by several of the company's titles. Although an ambitious technology, it seems that the Japanese public have been less than impressed by the company's previous motion capture title, *Shinjuku Police* (*Police 24/7*). As well as unveiling a sequel to this, which displayed little in the way of technical improvement, a virtual katana game by the name of *Tsurugi* was also premiered. Although an interesting concept at heart, the technology just isn't sufficient to do it justice. Hand movements intended to manoeuvre an onscreen katana are only fitfully translated into action, and a dash pedal proves scant recompense. The company's latest lightgun outing, *Jurassic Park III*, fared little better with attendees, despite being announced with much pomp.






Konami once again showed off its latest rhythm action titles, but the market for this genre is shrinking, and the company's experiments with motion-capture technology have not been entirely successful






Having owned 60 per cent of the arcade market last year, there is every likelihood that Sega will go on to increase its dominance this year

In general, the opinion seemed to be that Sega's *Lost World* title was superior in terms of gameplay and technical sophistication, despite appearing on the ageing Model 3.

It wasn't just Namco and Konami that unwittingly endorsed Sega's dominance of the coin-op sector, though. The likes of Tecmo and Taito also did little to distinguish themselves, with the highlight of Taito's offering being the dated shooter *Shikigami No Shiro*, which is also scheduled to appear on Xbox. Sammy merely announced a *Guilty Gear X* sequel to be revealed at the AOU show in February, and Capcom didn't even attend, having announced its intent to concentrate on home consoles.

Elsewhere, the focus seemed to be on attempting to compensate for SNES-era visuals via cabinet design, or to preview titles that are set to appear on home consoles shortly after their arcade debut. Either way, the coin-op manufacturers who attended the show demonstrated an overwhelming lack of confidence in the uniqueness of the arcade experience.

Sega retains dominance

Apart from Sega of course. Having owned 60 per cent of the arcade market last year, there is every likelihood that the company will go on to increase its dominance this year if JAMMA is anything to go by. Even a traditional competitor such as Namco has signed a commercial agreement with Sega in recognition of the lacklustre performance of its own System 246 technology, which rumours suggest will be phased out in favour of the Naomi board. Against the backdrop of increasing competition from home consoles and other leisure devices, Sega currently stands alone in maximising the unique potential of arcade gaming with titles like *Virtual On* and *Derby Owners Club*, and the introduction of electronic storage cards has proven particularly profitable for the company.

Indeed, it's unlikely that arcade gaming will become extinct while Sega remains committed to it. With widespread thirdparty adoption of the Naomi standard, and the continued success of the memory card scheme, the company has been able to reduce the standard price of coin-op games, from ¥200 (£1.13) to ¥100 (56p), which can only bode well, but it won't be until next year's 40th JAMMA expo that it will be clear whether such a monopoly is good for the sector.





Treasure's *Ikaruga* (above) was the most impressive title on show, but also on display were ***Lupin The 3rd: The Shooting*, *King of Route 66*, *Smash Court Tennis* and *Wangan Midnight***

JAMMA for short...

Now in its 39th year, the JAMMA exhibition is organised by the Japan Amusement Machinery Manufacturers Association, a trade body that is committed to the promotion and development of the coin-op industry. Apart from organising the Amusement Machine exhibition every year, the association also conducts a number of other activities on behalf of members, including research into arcade technology, establishing health and safety standards, and eliminating counterfeit coin-op devices. The body also held its 13th general meeting in May this year, which was attended by representatives from the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, and focused on revitalising an industry that finds itself beset by difficult market conditions. More information can be found at the organisation's website: www.jamma.or.jp/english/index.htm

GBA storms retail market

Impressive sales and upcoming GC compatibility help Nintendo roundly dismiss criticisms levelled at its latest handheld

With the hype and hysteria of the Japanese Game Boy Advance launch making its way to these shores intact, the last four months have seen a hugely impressive retail performance by the handheld. It seems that, despite reservations about the originality of its software line-up and poor screen performance, consumers have given Nintendo's device a massive vote of confidence. **Edge** spoke to **David Gosen**, Managing Director of Sales and Marketing for Nintendo of Europe, to discuss the unit's debut and find out the company's plans for the future.

"You've seen in the past that if you bring out new hardware and fail to bring out software that really delivers a paradigm shift or quantum leap… then the platforms don't do well"



Lacklustre GC reception

When pressed to explain the discrepancy between the overwhelming success of the GBA launch and the relatively muted reception afforded to GameCube, he's reluctant to make a comparison. "It's too early to make any comments on the GameCube launch in Japan," he argues. "I think their performance was a very good performance – other events happening at the time make a true read very difficult." However, he is clear about the reasons for the success of GBA. "You've seen in the past that if you bring out new hardware and fail to bring out software that really delivers a paradigm shift or a quantum leap in that gaming experience, then the platforms don't do well. What we've seen across Europe is consumers meeting and exceeding our expectations, because our sales are now in excess of 1.5 million across Europe – which is quite incredible."

Nintendo's David Gosen has no problems with the GBA screen, and highlights his company's vision of continuous gaming

SNES port worries

But what about the accusation that the GBA software line-up consists largely of SNES ports? Again, Gosen is bullish. "As the platform develops, you will continue to see new games and new genres brought to the platform – titles like *Kuru Kuru Kururin*, which is a tremendous puzzle game. By Christmas this year, there will be over 40 titles available to GBA, which is pretty good going in the first six months of a new platform. Yes, there are many games that have come from SNES, but some of them have been updated, some of them have been modified, and it's having the ability to play those games in an unconstrained way, not chained to your living room sofa."

Some would argue, though, that the GBA isn't quite as unconstrained as Gosen wants us to believe. The most common charge levelled at the device is that it's only possible to sees what's going on under optimum lighting conditions. Again, Gosen is dismissive of criticism. "We had a decision to make in terms of cost and battery life, and we decided to get the best cost possible for consumers by not introducing a backlit screen. It also allows us to deliver 15 hours of battery life. As games developers get used to working with GBA, then the games themselves may be designed in a different way to allow a brighter screen definition. Playing the games myself, I don't find it a huge problem." It's a disingenuous response, but one that Nintendo can get away with, given the commercial success of the device.

Going forward, this success will surely be bolstered by the arrival of GameCube, and the much-vaunted link-up capabilities of the two devices. Certainly, Gosen is keen

Advance figures

Total Game Boy hardware sales since launch in 1989: **110m**
Total GBA hardware sales across Europe in week of launch: **500,000**
Total GBA hardware sales across Europe to date: **1.5m**
Total GBA hardware sales across Europe forecasted by Christmas: **3m**
Mario Kart: Super Circuit sales in week of European launch: **150,000**
Total GBA software sales across Europe to date: **1.1m**
Total GBA firstparty software sales across Europe to date: **600,000**

GBA has sold at the rate of one every five seconds since its launch on June 22
Stacked end-to-end, the number of Game Boy Advances sold would equal the height of:
699 Eiffel Tower Monuments
861 Canada Square Buildings
3,598 Leaning Towers of Pisa





to endorse the company's 24:7 continuous gaming brand. "What games companies like us should be doing is trying to take away the constraints… the bottlenecks that make it difficult for developers to develop for platforms. The connectivity with GBA is just another example of how developers can really push the envelope to develop new gaming experiences."

There's life in the GBC yet

Despite the imminent arrival of GameCube, and the stellar performance of GBA, Gosen is also confident that the Game Boy Color can be home to new gaming experiences. He describes it as the entry product for Game Boy gamers, and one that has the capacity to build on the success of franchises such as *Pokémon*. "I think GBA will appeal to anyone who loves to play great games, but what we can do with GBC is reposition it as an entry-level product. Since the launch of GBA, the performance of GBC has continued to go from strength to strength, and the strategy appears to be working very well."

The GBC will continue to be supported, with two *Zelda* titles recently released, and *Pokémon Crystal* about to be launched. "Currently, we have no plans to stop producing it. The current demand in Europe is such that it warrants us to continue producing it. I expect there to be new titles from thirdparty publishers at least into the first quarter of next year."

It's for this reason that although details surrounding the European launch of GameCube are still sketchy, Gosen and Nintendo can continue to be optimistic about the future. Certainly, the emphasis on quality over quantity is unlikely to change just yet.





In addition to the raft of SNES ports, GBA is home to an impressive range of original content, such as *Kuru Kuru Kururin* and *Mario Kart: Super Circuit*



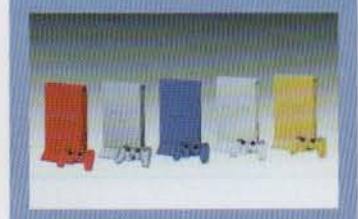
Gosen highlights forthcoming software for Game Boy Color – titles like *Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Seasons* – as another factor in the GBA success story

Advance Wars behind schedule – again



Veteran Nintendo gamers won't be surprised to learn that, once again, they will have to wait longer than their Japanese and American compatriots to get their hands on one of their chosen platform's killer apps (9/10 this issue). Referring to news that Nintendo of Europe has chosen to delay the release of *Advance Wars*, Gosen explains: "The decision was taken by Nintendo of Europe, given the recent tragic events in the US. We decided it was not an appropriate time to release a game of that title." No doubt aggrieved gamers will point to the fact that the title has been released both in Japan and the US, but Gosen is adamant that Nintendo doesn't treat European gamers poorly. "Europe is very important for Nintendo. It represents over 20% of global sales, so it's a vital region. You only have to look at some of the announcements made at the Nintendo show back in September, where Europe was used to launch Pokémon mini. Those sorts of announcements and discussions indicate that Europe's role in the global Nintendo business is growing – and will continue to grow significantly. What is sometimes difficult for consumers to understand is that because we have a PAL format, and a multi language environment, the time that it takes to localise product and adapt technology takes longer than it would if you were producing a game in the US. But in no way is Europe seen as a poor relation in the Nintendo global environment." Despite Gosen's rebuttals, there are many gamers who would disagree.

CUTTINGS



Sony invests in Square

Sony has revealed that it plans to invest ¥14.9bn (£85m) in an 18.6% stake in Square, giving it the second largest holding in the company. The announcement came a short while after news that Sony's games division has returned to profitability. It's good news for Square, which found itself in dire financial straits after the poor performance of 'The Spirits Within' at the box office.

Sony also announced a makeover for PS2 on the occasion of reaching global sales of 20 million units. The company has announced that the console will be available in five new colours, in a range called the "European Automobile Color Collection" from December 21. While the company clearly hopes to capture the burgeoning Christmas market, the price of the new models, ¥50,000 (£285), has provoked some criticism from Japanese gamers, who are particularly unhappy at having to fork out in light of the European price cut to £199. Nevertheless, the company still expects to shift 600,000 units.

'Official Xbox Magazine' ready for launch

Packaged in individually-numbered collectors' box packs, 'The Official UK Xbox Magazine' Launch Special hits the streets on November 8, priced £5.50. It includes a 30-minute video and a host of collectable Xbox materials, including technical blueprints of Microsoft's console. Running at over 75 pages, the magazine, which features previews of 100 forthcoming Xbox titles, is headed-up by ex 'N64' and 'PC Gamer' editor, James Ashton.

Meanwhile, the launch of the console itself has run into a few problems, with Microsoft delaying its US release until November 15 and announced that the hard drive will be 8Gb – which is smaller than the originally announced 10Gb. On a positive note, though, it has been revealed that the *Phantasy Star* franchise is set to appear on the console, while *Shenmue II* is to be an Xbox exclusive in the US.

The console will be available at launch for $299 (£207), although preorders are limited to bundles that range in price from $499 to $1,200 (£345 to £830).

New OS boost gaming performance

Microsoft's release of Windows XP and Apple's Mac OS X 10.1 upgrade prove to be winners for gamers





Graphic card manufacturers have been quick to release new drivers for Windows XP but are keen to underline their continuing support for OpenGL, with drivers which bring the functionality of DirectX 8.1 to OpenGL

Ironically, Microsoft refers to it as its biggest event since Windows 95, yet the launch of the Windows XP marks the end of Microsoft's support for its first Operating System (OS) to rely on a graphical user-interface. Built around a Windows 2000 core, XP runs off a 32-bit kernel, which has no backwards compatibility with Win95's 16bit DOS layer. Another departure sees XP unifying home users and corporate and business users within the same operating system for the first time. Windows XP ships in three different editions: home, professional and server.

Which is great news for gamers and game developers alike, according to Mike Burrows, a software engineer at Microsoft's Windows thirdparty gaming group. "Gamers should upgrade for stability and better gaming," he says. "Windows XP is built around the strengths of Windows 2000 and the most obvious of these are robustness and fault tolerance. We've also increased the effectiveness of Accelerated Graphics Port (AGP) memory and added DirectX 8.1 to ensure the best PC gaming experience remains on the Windows platform."

Pixel shading

DirectX 8.1 ships with XP and supports pixel shaders. This enables developers to model sophisticated material surfaces such as fur and brushed metal, as well as use new lighting and shadow effects. "It's a massive advantage for developers to be able to code using the same operating system that home users will play their games on, " Burrows continues. "Almost all developers will tell you they love developing on Windows 2000. They need to do very little extra to ensure their games run on Windows XP."

As for the dropping of support for Win95, it's not just a Microsoft decision, argues Burrows. "We finished supporting Windows 95 in DirectX 8.1 because publishers were finding few users of Windows 95 were buying games," he says. "Increasing their test burden for the minority of sales did not make good business sense."

> "Gamers should upgrade for stability and better gaming… XP is built around the strengths of Windows 2000 and the most obvious of these are robustness and fault tolerance"

Graphic support

Graphic card companies such as nVidia and ATI have been quick to add their support for the new operating system. In conjunction with the Titanium versions of its GeForce2 and 3 chips, nVidia released a new set of its Detonate drivers for XP. "We have found performance optimisations as high as 50% using Detonator XP with a GeForce3 Ti 500 and 1GHz-plus AMD or Intel processor under Windows XP," says







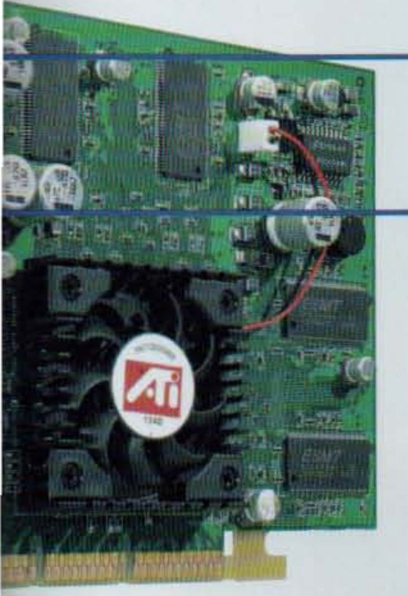




While the majority of games rely on Microsoft's DirectX, id's John Carmack remains committed to the flexibility offered by OpenGL. All his engines use it including the *Quake III* engine which powers *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (above). Other games that also use OpenGL include (clockwise from top left) EA's *Madden NFL 2001*, Sierra's *NASCAR 4*, Bioware's *MDK2* and Blizzard's forthcoming *Warcraft 3*







The Radeon 8500 features ATI's Truform and Smartshader technologies, both of which are supported under Windows XP

Luciano Alibrandi, nVidia's European Technical Marketing Manager. "You will see a big benefit from DetXP when running high resolutions such as 1,280 x 1,024, which we now consider the bare minimum for a serious hardcore gamer."

"The new line of Radeon products will ship with a new unified driver that works on all products in the family," comments **Mark Holmes**, ATI's UK Product Manager. "WinXP improves stability relative to Win9x and compatibility relative to Win2000. It also ships with DirectX 8.1, which enables support for the new Truform and Smartshader features of the Radeon 8500."

The joy of X

Changes in operating systems haven't been limited to Windows PCs though. The long-awaited 10.1 upgrade for Mac OS X users has speeded up gaming and general computer usage. Apple claims that the upgrade boosts games performance up to 20%, thanks to improved OpenGL performance. OpenGL is the vendor-neutral, multi-platform graphics standard, overseen by Silicon Graphics. MacOS 10.1 currently ships with OpenGL version 1.2.1.

The success of Microsoft's DirectX game programming tools had placed a question mark over the future of OpenGL, although this seems to have lifted with the release of the specifications for OpenGL 1.3. This latest iteration includes improvements with environmental lighting, anti-aliasing and texturing, and should broadly match the functionality of DirectX 8 and 8.1. The OpenGL architectural review board has recently started discussing the featureset of its next big release, OpenGL 2.0 as well.

John Carmack, co-founder of id software, is one of the main proponents of OpenGL – which he demonstrated with the unveiling of *Doom 3* at MacWorld Tokyo 2001. "It is still our intention to have a simultaneous release of the next product on Windows, Mac OS X and Linux," he commented at the time. "It is looking like several hardware vendors are making moves to expose all of their functionality through OpenGL extensions to be available when the product ships, rather than at the next DirectX cycle."

This has now been fulfilled by the likes of nVidia and ATI. nVidia's Detonator XP drivers support the latest OpenGL 1.3 specification, although these are not yet released for non-Windows XP platforms. "Detonator XP contains support for GeForce3's nfiniteFX engine. You may know them as pixel and vertex shaders under DirectX 8; under OpenGL they are called vertex programs register combiners," explains nVidia's Luciano Alibrandi.

ATI, too, has been supporting DirectX functionality within OpenGL. "Our new Radeon drivers for 8000-series chips include an ATI OpenGL extension which exposes equivalent functionality to the 1.4 pixel shader model in DirectX 8.1," reveals ATI's Mark Holmes. The company also recently announced its support for the GLSetup project. This free download utility [www.glsetup.com] checks that gamers are running the latest OpenGL drivers and patches.

The 10.1 upgrade for Mac OS X has speeded up gaming and general usage. Apple claims the upgrade boosts games performance up to 20%, thanks to improved OpenGL performance

CUTTINGS

Milia New Talent competition

The entrance process for Milia's eighth annual New Talent competition is underway. The contest is open to students of interactive content and technology development, with places for 15 international students to present their projects in a dedicated area at the Palais des Festivals at the event, which takes place in Cannes next year, from February 4-8. With over 7,000 industry professionals expected to attend, the New Talent competition represents a unique opportunity for students to showcase their work to a receptive and influential audience.

The deadline for entries is December 7, with the judging process overseen by a jury composed of a panel of experts in Paris on December 18 and 19. For more information, e-mail newtalent@reedmidem.com.

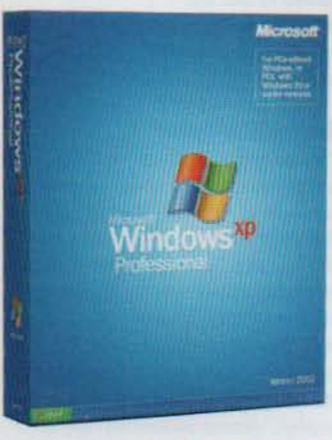
GameOn for would-be developers

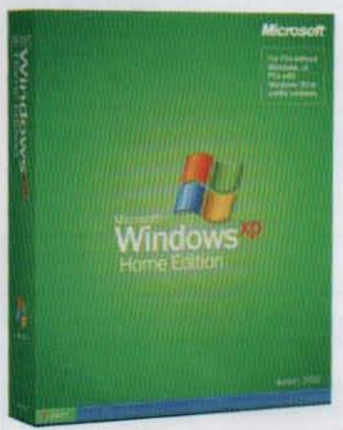
Fuzion Frenzy developer, Blitz Games, has relaunched its industry career website GameOn, which was originally launched two years ago. The company hopes that the redesigned site will be a definitive resource for people seeking a career in the videogame industry, from school leavers to experienced programmers. The site includes a reader's demo section, a career FAQ section, suggested reading book lists, one of the most comprehensive lists available on the web of games-specific university courses in the UK, and basic programming, modelling and animation tips and exercises. There's also a link to the Jobs section of the Blitz Games main site. See www.blitzgames.com for more information.

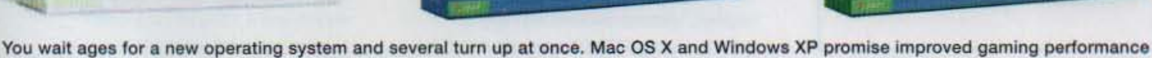
Sky offers Networked Cartoon gaming

Digital TV operator Sky has revealed that it's to team up with animation channel Cartoon Network to expand the range of gaming content available over its interactive service. A mix of free-to-air cartoon features and a pay-per-play area will feature licences such as 'Scooby Doo' and 'Powerpuff Girls', as part of the new Sky Active Games area, Gamestar. The move follows a deal with Rage that saw *Denki Blocks* launched on a pay-per-play basis in advance of its GBA debut.








You wait ages for a new operating system and several turn up at once. Mac OS X and Windows XP promise improved gaming performance

Into the great blue yonder

Broadband gaming is a key focus for Telewest's blueyonder high-speed Internet service







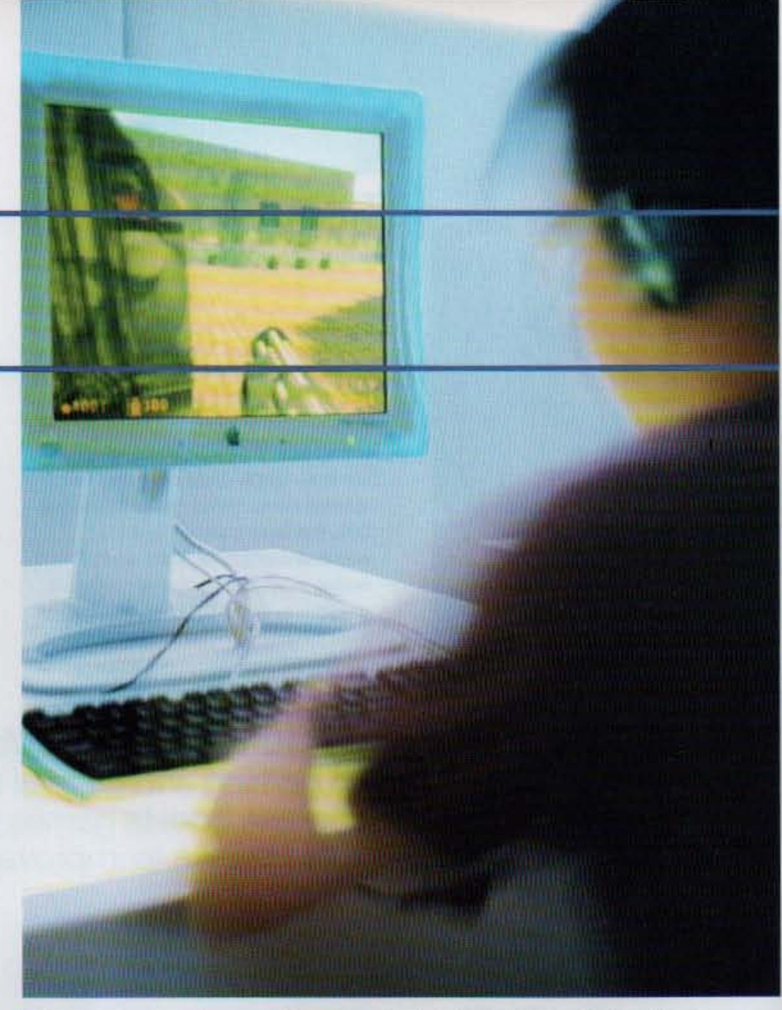
blueyonder's broadband gaming services offer all the community aspects required, including buddy lists, news, league tables and competitions

The light at the end of the broadband tunnel became a little brighter for gamers recently, following the massmarket rollout of Telewest's blueyonder gaming service. Costing £33 per month, plus a £50 installation charge, blueyonder focuses on four main areas of content: games, music, entertainment and local services.

"Gaming is not only an important part of blueyonder but also to Telewest as a whole," says **Tom Cotter**, Telewest's Head of Games Strategy. "We're currently involved in six different network and content ventures within the games industry. These range from the trial with Sony [PlayStation2] to the investment in Start! games."

Superfast connectivity

Offering what Telewest calls "near-LAN connection speeds", peaking at 512kb/s download and 128kb/s upload, blueyonder's multiplayer games service is built around a dedicated network. "It's been initially designed to support 15,000 simultaneous cable modem connections, although the architecture is scaleable to 120,000 simultaneous connections. That's 4 Gigabits per second, with 2 Gigabits per second dedicated to game servers alone," explains **Hugh Spencer**, Telewest's Games Development Manager. "Game server traffic only ever talks to the game servers on the dedicated public interfaces, without any interruption from downloads, WWW traffic or any other services. This ensures the game experience is as good as it could possibly be."



Telewest's long-term focus on internet gaming includes its blueyonder broadband services, as well as PlayStation2 trials and development through its Start! joint venture

"Game server traffic talks to the servers without any interruption from downloads, WWW traffic or any other services. This ensures the game experience is as good as it could possibly be"

As well as improving performance specs, blueyonder's games team is keen to foster a strong online community, with newsgroups, chat, leagues and competitions a high priority. Users also receive a limited amount of credits to book servers for clan events and training. Additional credits and privileges can be bought on a subscription fee basis, for either an additional £6.50 or £10 per month.

Tournament play

"The gaming site will offer some of the most sophisticated aids in the world for those running online tournaments," boasts **Neil Hardwick**, Telewest's Games Community Manager. "On top of this, there is already a strong community, with lots of volunteers who between them have hundreds of years experience organising Internet-based leagues, cups and ladders." Like many of the blueyonder games team, Hardwick originally became involved with online gaming running BT's Wireplay service. Other members hail from casualties of the online scene such as BarrysWorld and Gameplay.

According to **Murray Hume**, Telewest's Games Business Manager, this is not a fate that will befall blueyonder. "An awful lot of thought was put into this service," he explains. "All the necessary business planning has been done to ensure this service can and will be profitable in the long run." Areas of expansion could include taking the service into Europe, as well as featuring e-commerce and a range of downloadable content.

To date, Telewest has around 50,000 broadband and 300,000 narrowband customers within its 4.3 million home franchise area. Its main competitor, NTL, boasts 52,000 broadband and 620,000 narrowband customers within its 8.8 million home franchise area.

"We don't offer specific support for broadband gaming at the moment, but we are working on significant partnerships in that area," says **Justine Parrish**, NTL's corporate PR. NTL has also just launched its own unmetered massmarket broadband service. Available in 4.7 million homes, two levels of service are available: a 512kp/s peak cable modem connection for £25 a month and a 128kp/s peak cable modem connection for £15 a month.

Broadband boundaries

Both NTL and Telewest offer broadband services through their cable TV networks, each of which are bounded within specific franchise areas. Consumers can find out whose area they fall into by carrying out a postcode check at www.askntl.com or www.telewest.com/athome/gettingourproductsandservices.html.

However, even within these areas, a broadband connection is not guaranteed. Telewest, for example, claims blueyonder is available in 90% of its franchise area.

BAFTA nominations announced

Phantasy Star Online and Gran Turismo 3 among nominations for Interactive Entertainment Awards

In advance of the final awards ceremony on October 25, BAFTA has announced the nominations for its fourth annual Interactive Entertainment Awards, which includes entries as diverse as the U2 website and and the Marconi Online Museum. The announcement is the culmination of a lengthy judging process, featuring Simon Pegg of 'Spaced', Blur's Dave Rowntree and **Edge**'s own Steve Jarratt as jurors, with eventual winners announced at a ceremony taking place at London's Grosvenor House, to be hosted by Phill Jupitus.

"Despite the difficult times that have faced many interactive companies this year, there has been a record number of entries," declared **Sue Thexton**, Chair of the BAFTA Interactive Entertainment Committee. "The desire to be recognised by the Academy and peers has not diminished." Nominated videogames include *Phantasy Star Online*, *Gran Turismo 3*, *Mario Kart Super Circuit*, and *Black & White*, and this year also sees the inaugural Audience Award, sponsored by Amazon.co.uk.

Nominations

There are several videogame related nomination categories:

Category	Game	Developer	Publisher
Sports	*Virtua Tennis 2* *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* *ISS Pro Evolution 2* *Championship Manager*	Hitmaker Neversoft Konami Sports Interactive	Sega Activision Konami Eidos

Category	Game	Developer	Publisher
Games Mobile	*Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* *Mario Kart: Super Circuit* *Battlemail Kung Fu* *Snowball Fight*	Neversoft Intelligent Systems Battlemail.com Supedo	Activision Nintendo Battlemail.com Supedo

Category	Game	Developer	Publisher
Games – Networked	*Phantasy Star Online* *Gran Turismo* *Tank Wars* *Black & White*	Sonic Team Polyphony Digital 3D Groove Lionhead Studios	Sega SCEE E4 EA

Category	Game	Developer	Publisher
Games – PC	*Black & White* *Startopia* *Max Payne* *Hitman: Codename 47*	Lionhead Studios Mucky Foot Remedy IO Interactive	EA Eidos Take Two Eidos

Category	Game	Developer	Publisher
Games – Console	*Gran Turismo 3* *Red Faction* *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2* *SSX*	Polyphony Digital Volition Neversoft EA Sports	SCEE THQ Activision EA

Category	Game	Developer	Publisher
Sound	*Conker's Bad Fur Day* *Medal of Honor* *SSX* *Max Payne*	Rare EA EA Sports Remedy	Rare EA EA Take Two

Category	Game	Developer	Publisher
Music	*Black & White* *Shogun Total War* *Edge of Chaos: Independence War II* *Clive Barker's Undying*	Lionhead Studios The Creative Assembly Particle Systems Dreamworks Interactive	EA EA/Dreamtime Infogrames EA

CUTTINGS

Alone in the drive-in
The latest videogame title to attempt to make the leap from small to silver screen is Infogrames' *Alone in the Dark*. Dimension Films, a division of Miramax, has acquired the rights, and will no doubt be hoping for more success than the likes of 'The Spirits Within'.

Football teams sign agreement
Konami has announced that the forthcoming *Pro Evolution Soccer* will use data provided by the team responsible for *Championship Manager*. *Pro Evolution Soccer* is released for PS2 on November 16, while the latest version of *Championship Manager* will be available for PC from October 12.

Warthog develops for WAP
Cheadle-based developer Warthog has announced that it's developing a title for the wireless handheld sector. *Pirate Adventure* will be rolled out in November by the wireless internet division of mm02, Genie, in association with Scottish wireless games specialist Digital Bridges.

In-Fusio announces deal with Digiplug
In-Fusio, whose ExEn wireless game engine has been implemented by Orange and Vodafone, has announced a deal with ringtone specialist Digiplug to bring high-fidelity sound to wireless gaming. The companies plan to unveil a demonstration of the new technology at the beginning of next year.

Konami joins mobile gaming body
Konami Europe has declared that it's to sponsor the recently announced Mobile Games Interoperability Forum, an initiative set up in July by Ericsson, Motorola, Nokia and Siemens to draw up a mobile gaming standard. Other sponsors include Capcom, Digital Bridges, iFone, Picofun and Terraplay. For more information, visit www.mgif.org/

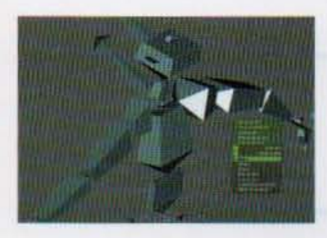
Cyber games
The 1st World Cyber Games 2001 will take place from November 23-25 in Singapore, sponsored by Samsung Electronics. With teams of cyber athletes set to participate in national qualifying rounds of titles like *Half-Life: Counter-Strike*, *StarCraft* and *Unreal Tournament*, the winners will go on to attend the 1st World Cyber Games in Seoul, Korea from December 5-9, where they will compete with over 500 players for prizes amounting to $300,000. For more information, visit http://sg.worldcybergames.org/main/index.asp.

Monkey Ball hits PlayStation2
Prior to the announcement of its multiplatform strategy at the Tokyo Game Show, Sega revealed a number of high profile cross platform developments. First up was news that the company will be developing a reworked version of its coin-op classic *Golden Axe* for Bandai's Wonderswan Color. The company also announced that it will be developing content for wireless platforms via Qualcomm's Binary Runtime Environment for Wireless platforms. Perhaps most significantly, it was announced that the hugely impressive GameCube title, *Super Monkey Ball*, is set to grace the PlayStation2.

Budget Warriors
After spending six months in the Top 20, Midas Interactive is to re-release *Dynasty Warriors 2* at the budget price of £14.99 at the end of November. The title, which was reviewed in **E**90, is the first in a new budget range designed to stimulate impulse buying. It will be joined by *Robot Warlords*, reviewed in **E**97, and at least 12 more titles following in the new year. Koei's sequel to *Dynasty Warriors 2* has already shipped 500,000 copies in Japan.

Guilty Gear X picked up for distribution
Virgin Interactive has acquired the European distribution rights to Sammy's *Guilty Gear X* for PlayStation2. The title will be released November 30 2001 at £39.99. **Edge** reviewed the Dreamcast version of the game in **E**94. New versions for the PS2 include a revamped tension gauge, instant kill move and user-defined combos.

Billion transistor processor in the offing
Intel has announced it's in the process of developing technology that will enable it to create a processor with more than one billion transistors, running at about 20GHz. A manufacturing technology called 'Bumpless Build-Up Layer' will enable the company to produce chips with faster performance and lower power consumption. The company plans to implement the technology between 2006 and 2007. For more information, visit www.intel.com/research/silicon





Discreet hopes that the user-created content for *gmax* games will eventually meet the standards of the professionals

Proving the concept

In order to demonstrate the potential of *gmax* to both developers and gamers, Discreet has been working closely with id software to create the Tempest *gmax* game pack, based on *Quake III: Arena*. Released as what Discreet is calling "an unsupported beta pack", all gamers need to design custom levels using Tempest is *gmax*, a copy of *Quake III* and the downloadable 540Kb *gmax* Tempest game pack.

The only major publisher to announce support for *gmax* is Microsoft, which will be shipping a game pack for its latest *Flight Simulation*, as well as Chris Taylor's delayed RPG *Dungeon Siege*. French publisher Microids has announced, somewhat strangely, that its ATP-licensed *Tennis* title will also support the technology.

gmax-imum impact

Discreet's lowering the barriers of entry for user-created game content with the help of its free gmax package



Announced at SIGGRAPH last year, Discreet's 3D content creation and animation toolset, *gmax*, has finally been released to consumers. Available as a free 21.4MB download from www.discreet.com/products/gmax, it's based on the latest release of Discreet's professional modelling package, *3ds max 4.2*, albeit with the renderer, advanced character animation, particle effects and material shaders removed.

"I am absolutely confident *gmax* will have a huge impact on the game mod community," says **Nick Manning**, Discreet's Territory Manager for UK, Ireland, Africa and Middle East. "Who knows? In a year or so there could well be over one million users. These users are tomorrow's game developers.

"*gmax* is unique – there's nothing else like it. The most important thing to understand is that *gmax* is two products. There's *gmax dev*, which shortens the time developers spend working on games, and *gmax*, which lengthens the time consumers spend playing on them," Manning explains.

In conjunction with the consumer release, Discreet is shipping the higher functionality *gmax dev* to developers. This application provides users with a set of texturing, mapping, lighting and keyframe and inverse kinematics animation tools, making it suitable for level designers. Compared to the consumer version, *gmax dev* additionally supports the .max file format and includes a full software development kit.





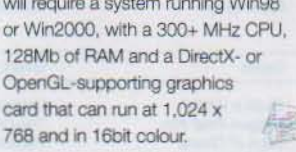
One of the first games to announce support for *gmax* is Gas Powered Games' forthcoming *Dungeon Siege* (top). *Quake III: Arena* (above) is also supported by Discreet's customiser.

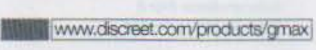
This is important because it means that developers no longer need to code level editors for each game they create. It also extends *3ds max*'s robust production pipeline from artists to level designers. Of course, this comes at a cost. A four-seat *gmax dev* licence will cost a developer $10,000 (£6,800) for two years. Another benefit for Discreet is that *gmax dev* encourages developers to upgrade their tools from *3ds max 3* to the current 4.2 version, as *gmax dev* only works with the latest build. Discreet is hoping it will reduce the level of *3ds max* piracy as well.

To enable consumers to modify games using *gmax*, developers (or publishers) have to pay another $85,000 (£58,000) to ship what Discreet is calling a *gmax* game pack. This integrates the level-editing tools into the specific game engine, enabling consumers to create and input their own models, animations, textures and lighting assets using the free downloadable version of *gmax*.

"Discreet won't be validating the *gmax* game packs in the way that Sony's validates PlayStation2 games," says Manning. "*gmax* game pack functionality is approved by Discreet. The only way a *gmax* game pack will work with the free consumer version is to get it compiled by Discreet." As for how publishers will deal with the release of the *gmax* game pack, Manning says this is up to them: "Some may want a separate retail release, but others may want the *gmax* game pack to be available online on their mods web site."

In order to run *gmax*, users will require a system running Win98 or Win2000, with a 300+ MHz CPU, 128Mb of RAM and a DirectX- or OpenGL-supporting graphics card that can run at 1,024 x 768 and in 16bit colour.







Fans of Microsoft's perennial favourite *Flight Simulator* will be able to customise planes to their hearts' content, thanks to the *gmax* game pack





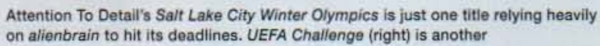
A digital production management (DPM) solution, *alienbrain* helps coordinate developers' resources, thus improving creative input, and by extension, the quality of the final product

Boosting the grey matter

NxN's alienbrain software enables developers to control their working practices while being quicker and smarter











Attention To Detail's *Salt Lake City Winter Olympics* is just one title relying heavily on *alienbrain* to hit its deadlines. *UEFA Challenge* (right) is another

What does digital asset management mean to the game consumer? muses **Gregor vom Scheidt**, CEO of digital asset management software developer NxN Software. Obscure as the question may sound, vom Scheidt believes it's extremely relevant to the current state of the games industry.

"The idea behind our product, *alienbrain*, is to enable developers to manage the complexity of large-scale digital media projects," he says, in answer to his own question. "Games are the most complex projects out there. Using *alienbrain* means gamers can play many more realistic games at affordable prices. We enable developers to make programs using up to 500,000 files at the same speed they originally made games using just 50,000 files."

Simply put, *alienbrain* is a client-server system which lets developers keep track of all the art assets in a title, by tagging each asset with the relevant information – who created it, when it was last edited, who signed it off as completed, and so on... This is fast becoming a crucial aspect of the development process as publishers require developers to localise their games into a dozen or so languages, as well as port them across three or more platforms. Another pressure arises from the growth of licence-driven games; assets often need to be cleared by external organisations such as sports governing bodies or movie studios.

"If you look at the games which make money, I would say that 80 per cent of those are licence-based or sequels," says vom Scheidt. "The approach developers have to take with such projects is completely different to those for original titles. Four or five years ago, the majority of titles were original, but today you have industrial-sized projects and you need industrial strength processes to deal with them. So what we do is digital production management, which is a set of methodologies and software systems that enable you to keep projects under control.

"For example, a producer typically manages a game development project using little bits of paper and enormous *Excel* documents," he continues. "He will typically spend four days a week doing useless management tasks, walking around the development team, checking on the state of the title. With *alienbrain*, we can reduce this to half a day, leaving the rest of the week available to working with the team to improve product quality."

Using *alienbrain* has the potential to free up artists' time too. "Almost all the processes an artist has to go through by hand – export a model, convert it, prepare it for PlayStation2, upload it to the test unit and test it – can now be automated using *alienbrain*," vom Scheidt says. And with reputed studios such as Argonaut subsidiary LTStudios, Angel Studios and Attention To Detail among the most recent wave of customers, it seems that vom Scheidt's message is being heard loud and clear.

www.nxn-software.com

Way out East

While *alienbrain* is obviously useful for large-scale projects, such as massive multiplayer games like *Star Wars Galaxies*, NxN has been surprised by the number of Game Boy Advance developers who are using the software. "The schedules for such games are so short and there are often people working externally from the main studio," Gregor vom Scheidt explains. "They really need to be on top of the development process."

Another growth area for NxN is the Far East. "China is growing fast because Western companies such as Ubi Soft and Konami are outsourcing to developers in Shanghai and Beijing," vom Scheidt explains. Infogrames is working with studios in South Korea and Vietnam. "Using *alienbrain*, these studios can submit their work daily to be cleared by their head offices," he says.



OUT THERE
REPORTAGE



Beach Life features everything you'd expect from a lad's holiday, right down to dodgy food poisoning



Some of the exotic locations seem a bit too classy for 18-30 booze cruise type vacations though



It's still not clear whether reality TV crews will be present in any of the game's holiday hotspots



With a logo straight out of the TV travel show school of design, it's a title that begs to be taken seriously



The Japanese GameCube launch might have been muted, but there's no doubt about UK fan loyalty



The lucky GameCube winner will find out on November 22, when 'NGC' magazine goes on sale

01 Sangria simulator

UK: Over the course of two decades, the visionary talents of Ian Livingstone have been turned to a whole gamut of gaming themes. From Warlocks and Firetop Mountains to Freeway Fighters and Sorcerer's Crypts, his is a career that has seemingly encompassed everything gaming has to offer. But now it seems there's more. *Beach Life* is a PC holiday simulation, to be published by Eidos Interactive in the Summer of 2002, developed by Deep Red and based on a concept by Livingstone. Essentially a *Tropico* without the banana republics, but with a healthy helping of sun, sea, sand and sex, it's a title that Eidos undoubtedly hopes will appeal to the Ayia Napa crowd. However, the company hasn't yet made clear whether it intends release a follow-up ambient/garage/bangin' house compilation album...

02 Mansion full of Luigis

UK: Walking past the offices of 'NGC' magazine (formerly 'N64' magazine), **Edge** couldn't help but notice what appeared to be some kind of Tate Modern post-Nintendo-apocalypse art installation. It turned out that it was the result of a reader competition with a Japanese GameCube up for grabs. "The only stipulation was that it had to be three-dimensional," explains Deputy Editor **Mark Green**. "So we got pasta, peanuts, Blu-Tac, chicken wire, porcelain, potatoes and fag packets. And some models that wouldn't look out of place next to Wallace and Gromit. When the postroom boys delivered the fifth postal sack of the day and plonked it down next to a life-sized Luigi someone had driven down from Northampton, we realised how much people love Nintendo." The winner will be announced in issue 62 of 'NGC', on sale November 22.

Soundbytes

"You see, there's a total disregard. Once they have it they do what they want. And if that happened in film, then I'd have to quit making films."

David Lynch expresses surprise at Sony's decision to show the Third Place advert in black and white, talking to David Hughes in 'Empire' magazine

"So when you mow down an army of soldiers in a firstperson blaster, their corpses will still be lying on the ground every time you return to a scene."

'Stuff' magazine's **Alex Simmons** eulogises over the Xbox hard drive

"*Halo*, Xbox's flagship shooter, has one of the smoothest control systems ever to grace a joypad: you use two analogue sticks at once, one for moving and strafing, one for aiming. On the PS2, the DualShock's sticks are just too flimsy for gameplay such as this."

'Stuff' magazine. Again.

"We're actually working on a triple-A title at the moment, which is a total departure from what we're used to."

Ed Bartlett of the Bitmap Bros. in damning indictment of own product shocker on www.computerandvideogames.com

03 Legal Nintender

UK: With a change of office imminent, the pile of electronic entertainment junk around **Edge's** 'spare' desk faced a serious ultimatum: translocation up a flight of stairs, destruction via a big yellow skip or distribution to the masses. Choosing the latter option, a hastily arranged competition on **Edge's** internet forum (www.futureforums.co.uk/edge/) saw readers invited to produce something that could fit inside these covers. The winner, forum user neeKlamy, bribed **Edge** with a wad of his Nintendo currency, complete with foil strip, Game & Watch stylings, and line sketch of Miyamoto. An inspired idea, although attempts to convince landlords that it's legal tender have inevitably met with failure.

04 More Third Place action

UK: To accompany the PS2 price cut, Sony commenced a new £15m brand advertising campaign at the start of October. Consisting of three separate treatments entitled 'Overboard', 'Chasing Rabbits' and 'Bambi', the campaign will apparently continue where David Lynch's confusing introduction to The Third Place left off, reflecting 'a new level of unpredictability that PlayStation2 offers', according to the press release. Look out for people unlocking their own personal Third Place up and down the country over the next few months.

05 Pinball zombie

Japan: Just when you thought they'd laid down and died, Sega's irrepressible zombie hordes are back. Having turned their undead talents to both shooting and typing, it stands to reason that the next genre they should turn their shambling attention to is pinball – for the Game Boy Advance, of course. Developed by Wow Entertainment and set for a Spring release, *Pinball Of The Dead* boasts surprisingly high-res graphics and gameplay which apparently combines shooting enemies and unlockable areas with standard pinball dynamics. My God.

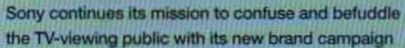
Data Stream

- Global sales of the ten episodes of *Final Fantasy*: **33m**
- Time taken to produce 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within': **four years**
- Number of graphic artists and animators that worked on 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within': **200-plus**
- Cost of producing 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within': **over $100m (£69m)**
- Estimated US box office gross of 'Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within': **$35m (£24m)**
- Percentage of registered players that completed EA's *Majestic*: **8.5%**
- Value of the UK's seven publicly listed videogame companies at their peak: **£1.8bn**
- Current value of the UK's seven publicly listed videogame companies: **£335m**
- Distance travelled by a Berkshire mother to deliver Game Boy to son on school trip: **900 miles**
- Cost of 900-mile trip by aeroplane and taxi: **£150**
- Expected loss made by Microsoft for each Xbox sold: **$100-$150 (£68-£102)**
- Expected loss made by Sony for each PlayStation2 sold: **¥10,000 (£57)**
- Expected loss made by Nintendo for each GameCube sold: **¥3,000-¥3,500 (£17-20)**








Sony continues its mission to confuse and befuddle the TV-viewing public with its new brand campaign




Edge can only hope that no animals were hurt or injured during the filming of this sequence




Pinball and the undead. It's a wacked out combo that wouldn't be amiss in a rock musical by The Who

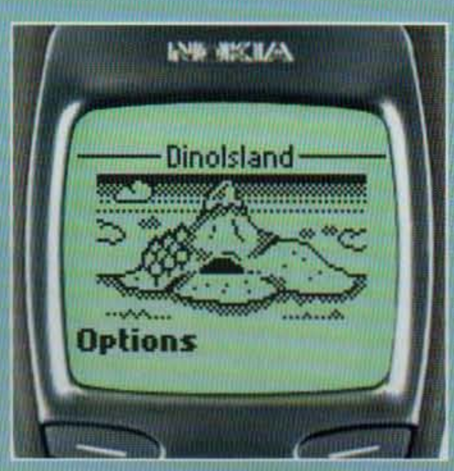

Given the high-res backgrounds, it's stunning to think that it's set for release on Game Boy Advance



Finally, a Game Boy Advance screen that you can see. Perhaps Nintendo should take note







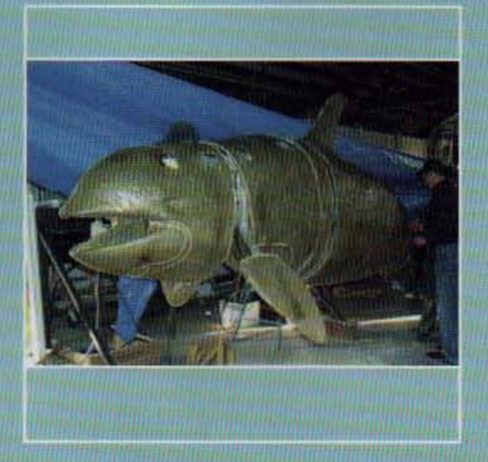


'The Redeemer': not a death metal band, just the winning entry in Logitech's design competition





Kubrick's chilling future vision inches a little closer, thanks to New York based International Robotics



06 Visible GBA screen shocker

US: Raging against Nintendo's poorly lit machine is nothing new, yet most people see reluctant purchase and hours of whining as their only option. Not Adam Curtis. Frustrated with Nintendo's inability to make a handheld with a screen that's actually visible, the engineering student from Iowa State set about building a frontlit GBA. The result: www.portablemonopoly.com, dedicated to his squinting rage and successful construction, and a beacon of hope to those who want a more pleasant handheld experience

07 WAP emerges from Jurassic age

UK: In what it claims is the most advanced WAP game available, mobile phone operator Orange has combined the gotta catch 'em all dynamic of *Pokémon* with the saurian sexiness of the Jurassic age. *Dinolsland* requires exploration to capture rare dinos, which can then be fed and cleaned in preparation for combat against other users. Graphically, it falls somewhat short of the BBC's 'Walking With Dinosaurs'.

08 Logitech Design competition

UK: It bends in the middle, has a trackball, but no analogue sticks. Still, the winning entry of the Joytech Design Challenge 2001 is better than the Jaguar controller. 'The Redeemer' came from design graduate Stephen Withers, and his prize is a contract working at the company, a trip to its Hong Kong operation and the chance to work alongside Joytech's new PR executive, Alex Verrey, aka Big Boy Barry of GamesWorld fame. Stephen is said to be looking forward to travelling abroad.

09 Sound boffins redefine gaming

US: Considering **Edge's** obsession with both Big Robots and videogames, we felt obliged to investigate International Robotic's intriguing press release. For a start, it has developed the world's first life-size robotic killer whale. More importantly, it's in talks to bring its Hyper Sonic Sound Beam Technology to the videogame industry, which enables sound to be projected between locations without being heard. Surely good news for Bemani fans.



Bowling
Monkey Bowling **inspires Edge Editor to real-life 245 score**

Comics
Daniel Clowes, Alan Moore, Grant Morrison. They're great

Big Boy Barry's box of delights
Well, of thirdparty peripherals anyway



Advance Wars postponement
Surely it's not that inappropriate

Poor Super Monkey Ball sales
Don't Japanese gamers know what's good for them?

Former-Edge Editor's iSketch competitiveness
It's just ruining it for everyone else



10 Columbia Road

Slim, a dotcom-millionaire hopeful with his hardcore gaming e-zine, and his flatmate Pavlov, an anal-retentive Agony Uncle on a teenage girl's magazine, were living a comfortable life in their house on Columbia Road until Pavlov's sister, Cisco, turned up. Cisco, the narrator, arrives on her brother's doorstep looking for a place to stay. Slim seduces her, she falls for him, and the next morning the evil landlord, Cartier, finds them in bed and raises the rent to accommodate the new lodger. But the bad news (like the story) drags on. Slim discovers his e-zine, and his paper millions, have been swallowed up in a puff of dotcom smoke. The fee for Pavlov's column has been halved and Cisco's temp job – a receptionist at a modelling agency – barely covers the telephone bill for Slim's latest obsession: The Money Shot, an online hunt for the details of a bank account holding a million pounds which Slim believes he'll win.

Sleazy Cartier offers the trio a way out: install webcams throughout the house and he'll waive the rent for the foreseeable future. They decline at first. But, after a failed attempt at a bank robbery, they decide there's nothing for it but the cameras. Therein begins a rapidly downward spiralling tale of life in Big Brother-style life under surveillance ending in disaster – not least thanks to the pirate copy of 'The Money Shot' Slim was playing, which means he doesn't get the jackpot after all.

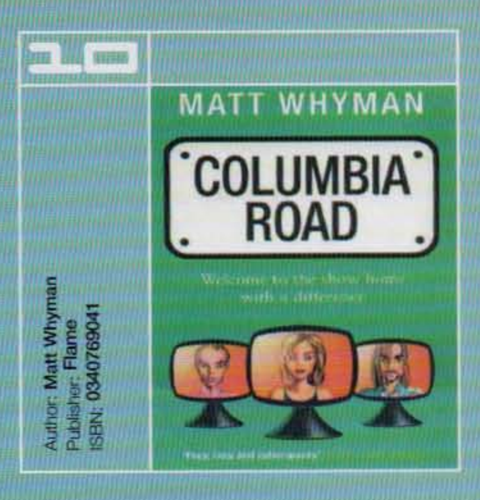
It's a desperate tale. Learning the hard way why people value their privacy could be made mildly amusing, but it in no way stretches the length of this verbose book. On the jacket, 'The Daily Mirror' praised Whyman's previous novel 'Man Or Mouse' as "pacy, racy and cyberspacey". By contrast, 'Columbia Road' is sluggish, pedestrian and one-dimensional.

11 How to Build a Time Machine

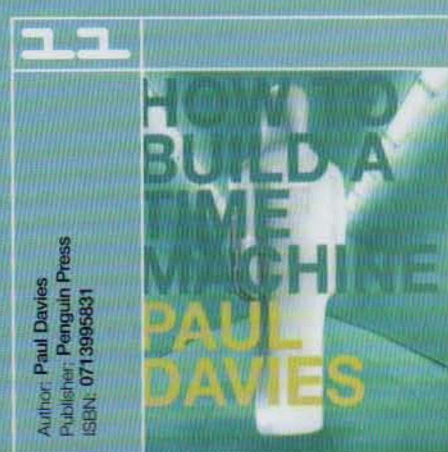
First things first. Don't get your hopes up. This is not a Do-It-Yourself guide to building Time Machines. Surprise, surprise. Having said that, Paul Davies' little gem of a square tome is a neat, if brief, sketch of humanity's quest to build a time machine. From H.G.Wells' prescient musings: "I am afraid I cannot convey the peculiar sensations of time travelling: They are exceedingly unpleasant" to scientists' hypothetical conjectures on how to actually do it, the lessons are brief but amazing.

If you travelled back in time to the same moment, could you accumulate several copies of yourself? Why can't the speed of light be breached? Is 'Star Trek's warp speed all nonsense? And where do you find wormholes anyway? Davies' book doesn't break any new ground, but he does neatly summarise the status quo and where it might lead. If we could create a vehicle that would travel at 99.9% the speed of light, we could travel very quickly forward in time. Then all we'd need is another device that somehow let us pop through a wormhole (the cosmic rather than the common-or-garden variety) and, presto, you're back in the present, so to speak – depending, of course, on whether you believe in the Parallel Universe theory.

'How to Build a Time Machine' is a brain-teasing, though ultimately satisfying, one-way trip through the history of time travel and the different ways people have thought about doing it. Make time for this book. What if one of them is right?



Author: **Matt Whyman**
Publisher: **Flame**
ISBN: **0340769041**



Author: **Paul Davies**
Publisher: **Penguin Press**
ISBN: **0713995831**



Site: **Matt's Garden**
URL: **www.the-good-stuff.freeserve.co.uk/garden/index.htm**

12 Web site of the month

After last month's investigation into the making of *Manic Miner*, **Edge** readers may wish to get their own glimpse into the psyche of one of the giants of 8bit gaming via the matt's garden Web site. It's certainly a pretty place, featuring the man himself, resplendent in pinstriped suit, as well as an attractive duck pond and an imposing MegaTree. It's difficult to tell what Freud would have made of it all, though.



13 Advertainment

Japan: Horse racing games, although noticeably absent from Western game shop shelves, rival any genre in Japan. But rather than opt for the typical fast-paced action of most adverts for this format, Media Factory has instead focused primarily on one man's perilous attempt to tame a ferocious steed.

01 "I'm asking you." 02-03 "I'm begging you." 04 ... 05 "Come on! Let's be friends." 06 "Yes! Yes! That's it!" 07 "Daddy..." 08 "...you are so wonderful." 09 Voiceover: "Derby Stallion 64. The saga continues on the N64." 10 "Yeeeeeeeeeeeeeeehaaaaaaaaaaaa!"



REDEYE

A sideways look at the videogame industry

Editorial integrity: the perils of being a media whore

RedEye glances out of the window, watches sparse clouds roll quickly across an October evening and smiles. Storm's-a-comin': the gods are angry tonight. They're always angry, because that's what they're best at – spite, plagues, reaping revenge on the corrupt. Where's the drama in a placid cosmos? The heavens boil, and astronomers strain to glimpse the artworks of deities through global networks of radio telescopes. They succeed.

A fact pops into RedEye's head: did you know they've just discovered more new planets orbiting stars way beyond our solar system? They've caught 74 of them since 1995, and – here's the exciting bit for those prepared to make a galactic leap of faith – some are the size of Earth or similar. That's all 'they' know, for now, but it's enough to fire RedEye's imagination. Proving his constitution hasn't been completely eroded by 20 years of videogames, RedEye wraps up warm for the autumnal chill and makes his way out to the wobbly deckchair in his garden, ready to gaze.

He sits down, stares up at the blurred orange night sky, and searches for the right pinprick of light. There's not much starlight to see through the thick city smog: *that's* a police helicopter, and *that's* the glowing red tip of a phone mast on a block of flats, and *that's* another police helicopter... But eventually RedEye finds something static, locks onto it, and feels it burn brighter into his red retina. Imagine.

That's a star, and around it there are eight planets, slowly circling. Though the stoic rules of Science forbid evolution on seven of those planets, as luck would have it, the eighth is just like ours: temperate, benign, inviting. On it, conveniently, there's a race just like ours, and somewhere in the planet's Northern Hemisphere there's a deckchair just like RedEye's. And on that deckchair slumps a RedEye facsimile staring straight back at RedEye, mouthing something. RedEye can't quite make it out. He squints, listens, hears the syllables echoing through the cosmos. It's coming...

"Bastard."

"What?"

"Bas... tard."

"What?"

"What do you mean, 'What?' Bastard! You want reasons? Bas. Tard. Bastard, bastard, bastard, bastard! Bastard!"

"..."

"Look at yourself. You're as bad as all of them. You. Are. As. Bad. As. Them."

And RedEye glances deep into his soul, and... Oh God, he's right.

The thoughts started rolling around in the morning, when RedEye found himself invited by Microsoft to attend an Xbox press gig. The two-day trip is designed to emphasise the Xbox's European presence, and is taking place in Cannes, a sunkissed statement of intent in the face of growing PS2 popularity. In essence, it's a pointed reminder to the industry that Microsoft still exists, although how much that'll matter to a public smitten by price drops and *GT3* remains open to question. But, not for the first time, the public aren't the point: Microsoft's jolly is all about wooing those capable of propaganda.

But they only do it because they have do, and they only have to do it because everyone else does. You need friends in this cesspit, and, like everyone knows, the best way to get friends is to buy them. Perhaps the solution is to follow the lead of the houses of parliament, and force all parties involved to participate in a Members Register of Interests. RedEye would dearly love to read that: Editors who went to school with developers, marketing men who know which mags'll bend in the face of a three-month advertising run, freelancers who offer reviews on a strict gram-per-percentage-point basis. And his name, too... RedEye's been on enough PR-funded drinking sessions to last him a lifetime. Oh God...

RedEye's star cousin echoes through again, light years of vitriol now washed out to pity.

"What did you think they wanted, RedEye? You're not stupid. I know that, because we're the same, you and I."

"I just..."

"You thought the PR girl took you to lunch because she liked you? You thought that press trip was to Milan because the company just thought that it'd make an appropriate backdrop to their latest soulless FPS? And the boxed copies, record bags, and dreadful, dreadful black printed T-shirts. Gifts? Sweeteners. You didn't go after them, but you took them anyway. Where do you draw the line, RedEye? When do you start to declare interest, to publish intent?"

And that's where RedEye snaps, because there is a line, and that line is Truth. As long as you're writing something you believe in, as long as you'd swear by every single word you see published in your name, then you haven't crossed it. The whole PR junket thing is a maze, inked in tight moral code, and there isn't an easy solution, but there are bribes and *bribes*: RedEye's stargazing has pushed him into insomnia, but where does all this leave the two Editors who, this month, sold their magazine and readership out in exchange for holidays for them and their girlfriends; who pre-arranged fawning reviews and, in doing so, traded their souls and any dignity they had? Or what about the marketing and PR execs who arranged the 'deal', or the publishers who were privy to it, or anyone who knew it was happening and didn't say anything. How are they sleeping tonight? Short answer: probably soundly, wrapped in duvet covers stitched from cum-stained dollar bills and lined with gold. Shorter answer: who cares? Burn in hell, you conscienceless bastards.

Where does all this leave the Editors who sold their magazine and readership out in exchange for holidays for them and their girlfriends?

Those gods watching over RedEye's heavenly portion of suburbia nod, and the skies tremble. A light rain starts to fall, and RedEye gets up, shrugs, and walks indoors. As he does, his star fades, blinks, curves off into the distance. Turns out it was just another police helicopter after all, watching over something nearby, tracking someone else's guilt. Funny: still, it pays to question your motives once in a while, schizophrenic episode or not. Even funnier that, in a time of global fear and change, the one thing we can rely on is that some people can't be trusted. There has to be a point when we say 'no more'. The gods are still angry. RedEye's just tired.

RedEye is a veteran videogame journalist. His views do not necessarily coincide with ***Edge****'s*

Prince once sang: "There's joy in repetition." There's a lot of truth in that, but the way the little purple one repeated the claim throughout the song made it clear he was talking about a particular sort of repetition: the sort that comes with variation. In this case the variations were exquisite modulations of timing, with the voice slouching behind or strutting ahead of the beat, or minuscule recolourings of verbal emphasis. Similarly, the hypnotic repetitions of minimalism, as practised by composers Steve Reich and Philip Glass, as well as those of minimalism's direct descendant, trance music, are in the forms' best exemplars not mere cut 'n' paste clonings, but subtle recontextualisations of the initial statement. We might call this 'constructive repetition' in order to distinguish it from the case of monotonous repetition, where you just get exactly the same thing, over and over again.

In videogames, too, there is a tension between constructive repetition and monotonous repetition. However, merely to call a game repetitive is not necessarily to denounce it. In the golden age of twitch games, monotonous repetition was paramount to the induction of a zen-like 'flow' in the gameplayer's consciousness. The player would learn patterns in order to defeat wave after wave in *Robotron* or *Tempest*, and attempt to repeat those strategies precisely each time they started from the beginning. In this way, monotonous repetition was the goal of the player's strategy, the logical end-point of hours of constructive repetition where the correct strategy was being sought through experiment and variation. This remains true for something like *Ferrari F335 Challenge*, in which the ideal is to race lap after lap in exactly the same, optimal way.

The achievement of monotonous repetition in twitch games, then, can represent the pleasurable acquisition of a skill; of a set of motor routines that become learned by the hands and mind. Then, in games such as *Wipeout 3*, the purist monotonous repetition of flying the track accurately becomes a constructive repetition, because you must negotiate the track with attention to the moment-specific demands of blowing other ships up and avoiding mines. At the other end of the spectrum are the videogames where repetition is not an obvious goal at all – where we are offered the illusion of a complex, non-repetitive world. Here, the sudden appearance of monotonous repetition can disrupt the flow of the gameplay and wrench us out of willing immersion. This has become especially noticeable in the paradigm of boss battles.

The standard procedure for the player faced with a boss battle is first to rush around trying different tactics and seeing what works, and then to refine their operations into a discrete set of actions calculated to defeat the boss after a set number of monotonous repetitions. In practice, this construction has become weighted too much towards the 'wrong' sort of repetition. The initial stage of a boss encounter – the constructive repetition of working out your strategy through repeating moves that keep you safe while varying offensive actions – is always the most exciting, because it engages the creative mind in a high-stress problem-solving mode.

However, when the correct tactics are discovered, the monotonous repetition of applying them ten, 15 or 30 times in order to defeat the enemy can rapidly become frustrating. Any mistakes you make now are merely because your finger slipped, or the control scheme is too clunky, or you're just bored because you've been doing exactly the same thing for the last half an hour.

Revealingly, one of the ways in which *Metal Gear Solid*, for example, varies between its selectable skill levels is that on harder settings the bosses simply have longer health bars, and so it takes more monotonous repetition to defeat them. That is not a clever way to enhance the challenge of a game; it just makes it more boring. Even on the easy setting, my feeling is that the confrontation with Metal Gear Rex at the game's climax is a shade too long in the monotonous repetition stage; as is the battle with Ganondorf in *Ocarina Of Time*. These are, after all, two great exploration games in which the player is encouraged all the way through to experiment, to have fun with new skills, and to pit his wits against novel situations and challenges, but when it comes to the boss battle in each game – aesthetically awe-inspiring though Metal Gear Rex and Ganondorf are – we suddenly regress to the twitch paradigm of 'learn a pattern and repeat it ad nauseam'. It is not that Metal Gear Rex and Ganondorf are too difficult, but that they too rapidly become tedious.

Recently there appears to be something of a movement towards more boss encounters. Indeed, in games such as *Freak Out* or *Luigi's Mansion*, nearly every enemy is a kind of boss, in that the player needs to construct a certain repetitive strategy to win. In such cases, an imbalance towards monotonous repetition can become even more wearing. It is lovely to discover that a certain ghost will be distracted by leaves blowing in through a window if you pull the curtain open, but once you have worked this out, it becomes annoying to have to repeat the action so many times, especially with the thumb-troubling circular action required to operate Luigi's vacuum cleaner.



TRIGGER HAPPY

Steven Poole

Repetition: there's joy in it, apparently

The solution is, quite simply, to adjust the balance between the constructive and monotonous repetition stages of boss battles. Make a boss more wily; make the tactics required to defeat him more cunningly opaque. Let us tax our brains in constructive repetition for longer; make it more of a cerebral challenge. That is where the meat of a boss confrontation ought to be. Once we have figured out the right way to defeat him, why should we have to repeat it more than a handful of times? For now we have solved the puzzle, and are just being mechanically hampered from seeing what comes next. There's joy in repetition, sure, but even Prince knew better than to let that song last 30 minutes.

In the golden age of twitch games, monotonous repetition was paramount to the induction of a zen-like 'flow'

Steven Poole is the author of 'Trigger Happy: The Inner Life Of Videogames' (Fourth Estate). Email: trighap@hotmail.com

Just a day before I wrote this article, the US fired the first wave of missiles at Afghanistan. I know in such a context, it is not really right to speak about videogames, but work goes on and I'm working at this time. And it appears the terrorist attack is having quite an effect on the videogames industry. Some titles cannot be promoted anymore. Blood and violence are to be avoided. This doesn't just concern violent scenes, though. This touches any scene that includes keywords like 'explosion', 'crash' or 'panic'. We are not ordered by law to remove these scenes, but the course of events strongly advises us to comply. And the situation affects us on other levels, too. Some advertising campaigns have completely disappeared; others have been delayed and more have seen their content changed or even cut. I find this very sad. People have put all their creativity and energy into making an ad which will never be broadcast.

We are designing many different ad concepts for the game promotion campaign. Among them, one has some features which are causing concern in the light of the September 11 event. In this particular ad, there is a giant monkey attacking a city. Buildings are destroyed and people panic. Some feel that these elements now appear disturbing. Having thought long and hard about these issues, I have to admit their concerns may be true. However, I think the ad has a very comical design – it's made to look cheap. But this cheap look may also be seen negatively following the terrorist attack, like a lack of respect.

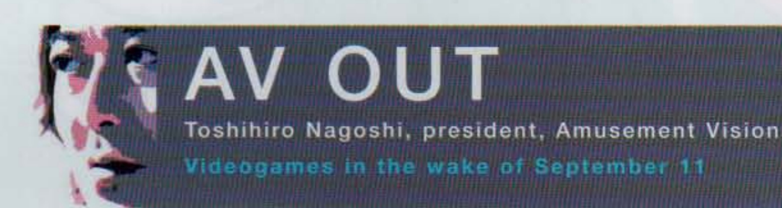
I heard many remarks from my staff: "We should abandon this ad" or "We should remake it" or "If another company does a similar ad, we should do it", etc… So I thought if it is possible to fix the ad, okay, then let's do it. But I did not have the budget and more importantly I did not have the necessary time anyway. So I had to come to this decision: we

other people, from outside the industry, may think about us. I think it is a fundamental concern for the entertainment industry. People might say I'm going too far or there's no connection, but this is my policy.

Of course, my objective is to make a hit and I believe I will continue in the future. But I can't do it by any means, by not thinking about my environment and the people around me. I would prefer to fulfill my goal while keeping my attention on what's happening and on people's concerns. I can't work without policy. It is an important guideline. I guess that guys who make games by any means and without any policy are just interested in money. I can't stand that. I see games as a great way to speak with users, to open my thoughts and my emotions to others.

Of course, as a pro, money is vital. But money is not everything. I think games are about something more than just money. I would like people to feel that





AV OUT

Toshihiro Nagoshi, president, Amusement Vision

Videogames in the wake of September 11

There is an even more sad situation – one concerning games which have had their release delayed. People put a lot of energy and a lot of themselves into designing great content, trying to respect a tight deadline and, because of the terrorist attack, the release is delayed. In some cases, games are being delayed with no details about when they will ever be released. If one of my games was affected by such a problem, I would be devastated. Deeply depressed.

And it is not the case that only war simulations and titles with military content have been affected by this tragic event, since titles with no apparent war content are being touched as well. For example, a character whose name is similar to one of the terrorists' would have to be changed. Every game maker is very busy dealing with these issues. As one of them, I feel very strange. In fact the situation has actually had an impact on my company. "Which title?" you ask. Well, it concerns a game I have just released, *Super Monkey Ball*. Surprised? How can *Super Monkey Ball* have any relation with the terrorist attack? Well, the game itself is no problem, but one TV ad is.

cut all the troubling parts and for the rest let's wait and see how things evolve. Yes, that was sad.

In a similar process to game development, an ad starts as a series of designs and ends in a studio for shooting and video editing. I experienced the whole process and have salvaged some souvenirs.

as well. It is also important to create a community by gathering the advertising and content around this idea. If not, making games simply becomes work without any sense of creativity. Games created without policy or just for money… I don't think they are very enjoyable.

I guess that guys who make games by any means and with no policy are just interested in money. I can't stand that

Now if you consider the promotion campaign featured an entire series of ads, taking one out makes the whole thing meaningless. So, yes, it was very disappointing. But compare that to the people who are suffering as a result of the September attack. It is a minor problem. I mean you cannot compare my concerns with such a tragedy.

A very small number of people may make the following remark to me: "What? How can you be that weak or naïve? In business you have to show a far stronger image and go for it!" However, I feel as though it is impossible for me to follow such views. As a member of the entertainment business, I have this belief that we have to take into account what

So this time, regarding the ad, I agreed to make changes. I believe that there are many creators troubled at this time. Some may also feel outraged by the difficulties happening to them because of the current events. The only way is to wait for the cloud to pass. An entertainer has to stay cool and focused, whatever is happening and however much it may affect his work. Just say "Okay, this is as it is" and let's look at the future and show good energy. Then let's pray that everlasting peace will come to this world as quickly as possible. Every day counts.

Toshihiro Nagoshi is president of Amusement Vision, formerly Sega subsidiary Soft R&D #4

Edge's most wanted

TimeSplitters2

With greatly improved animation, well structured mission goals and advanced MapMaker functions, this should be the best FPS on both Xbox and PS2.



(PS2/Xbox) Eidos

Baldur's Gate Dark Alliance

Combining the retro-gameplay charms of *Gauntlet* with the beard appeal of 'Dungeons & Dragons', *Baldur's Gate* is another must-have PS2 title.



(PS2) Interplay

Soul Calibur 2

Edge's soul still yearns for the next instalment in the series that single-handedly defined the next-generation standard of graphics and gameplay.



(Coin-op) Namco

Shake It Bravoes!

A rhythm action game with a little culture? Maybe this'll be the one to oust driving games from the hearts of the PlayStation 2 masses. Or maybe not.



(PS2) SCEI

Wysinwyg

The truth about game images

Read the small print accompanying many a game advert back in the 8bit and 16bit era and you'll often come across one cunningly diminutive proviso: 'Actual screenshots may vary.' The trick was easy: port a popular arcade game – say, *Outrun* or *Gauntlet* – on to a number of platforms, and make sure all the glossy game ads ran with images taken from the best version. A touch of small print ensured maximum sales, legal immunity and widespread dissatisfaction. It was remarkable how many people were disappointed when they discovered the Spectrum couldn't actually handle more than two colours in an 8x8 attribute square.

Of course, ITC regulations and greater media awareness among punters ensure that such misrepresentation doesn't occur today. If only that were true. EA has been known to air TV ads of PSone titles while using images taken directly from the PC version. Truth is, publishers wield marketing power with even more cynicism than before. 'Rendered-up' images of forthcoming titles for Xbox, GameCube and PlayStation 2 are becoming more prevalent by the day. Publishers may argue that the graphics have advanced so much that the difference is negligible. Those who bought *Mission Impossible* (below) on the back of early images might disagree.

But in practice **Edge** cannot completely wash its hands of this process. After getting the opportunity to experience a game such as *Dead or Alive 3* (**E**103) – complete with an in-depth interview – it would've been folly to reject it simply because the publisher decided to send through suspiciously high-res images. The choice was stark: print no information, or go with the full report – albeit with slightly air-brushed images. (Of course, the accompanying screenshots of *Dead or Alive 1* and *Dead or Alive 2* were thrown in as bonus Easter eggs.)

Videogame public relations can be a cut-throat business. While **Edge** is occasionally hamstrung into printing 'touched-up' screens – simply because they're the only ones supplied – other companies go further. One big name publisher sent **Edge**, among other magazines, an email reminding journalists that it was unsporting to print negative text next to images of its games, and that future relations may suffer if the process continued. **Edge** hasn't featured a wrestling game since.

Such pressures come to bear on a magazine's production every month. And while **Edge** will always attempt to avoid 'rendered-up' images, you can be sure that in the final analysis its critical faculty will not vary.













Biohazard

Rumours abound of Capcom's imminent desertion of PlayStation in favour of GameCube. If it's true, hopefully the result will be more titles of this calibre







New locations, such as the forest (left), coupled with a slightly new structure should ensure that older gamers have something worth revisiting



Biohazard fans will recognise this scene well. The moment when the zombified dogs attack for the first time is truly memorable. Expect it to be all the more potent on GameCube

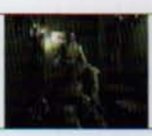
The question which must be asked is simple: for all its graphical splendour, is an updated version of a five-year-old game really worth experiencing for a second time? When Capcom announced it was to move the popular *Biohazard* franchise over to GameCube, a few eyebrows were raised, and yet when footage of the new update was screened it positively shook the industry. Scenes of unmitigated gore coupled with extraordinarily well-rendered locales and fluid character modelling left little doubt that the series was worth resurrecting. News that **Shinji Mikami** was to become creative director of the project (the first time since 1996) made the announcement all the more mouthwatering.

But confusion still reigns over Capcom's decision to switch allegiance. Will Capcom's PlayStation2 development wind down? And will Nintendo demand exclusivity from Capcom to its platform? Although the sequel to *Devil May Cry* and *Onimusha* are still going ahead on Sony's hardware, it seems likely that the movement across to GameCube will become more pronounced in 2002. "It is clear for us that GameCube is about to become the console for players, for those who really want to enjoy videogames," says Mikami-san. A significant statement considering he is fast becoming the public face of Capcom.

Whatever the relationship with Sony it is known that Capcom is committing the next three to four years to the *Biohazard* series on GameCube. Although Mikami-san will take an overseeing role (similar to Miyamoto's position at NCL) on the project, he has also revealed that he will be working on completely fresh ideas for Nintendo's hardware. *Biohazard* will be released in March 2002, with *Biohazard 0* (an original title) due for release before the end of 2002. *Biohazard 2* (*Resident Evil 2*), *Biohazard 3* (*Resident Evil 3*), *Resident Evil: Code Veronica X*, and another original title, *Biohazard 4*, will all follow until 2005.

Mikami-san puts down his change of loyalty to the struggle of developing on PS2. Although he has created impressive results with *Devil May Cry*, the time it has taken the team to put together the footage already seen for GameCube *Biohazard* is the strongest indication yet of the power and efficacy of Nintendo's hardware. Also, he does not believe that the PS2's dominance in the short term will last, underlining the fact that most of his previous projects – including *Devil May Cry* and the original *Biohazard* – were opposed by his bosses.

Beside the technical aspects, Mikami-san cites the controller and general Nintendo outlook as a determining factor in his decision. "I am planning to give players maximum fun. To do so, the GameCube was the only feasible platform. A game must be played for fun through the pad. It is not only a

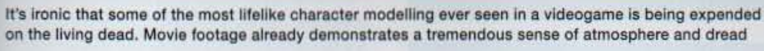




Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **Q1 2002 (TBC) UK**







It's ironic that some of the most lifelike character modelling ever seen in a videogame is being expended on the living dead. Movie footage already demonstrates a tremendous sense of atmosphere and dread

question of the visual." Indeed, Mikami-san is keen to emphasise that there will be fresh ways to play through the update of *Biohazard*. New locations will be available (the forest scene depicted in the demo aptly demonstrate this) and the structure has been altered to keep even the most ardent Biohazard aficionado on his guard.

But what has been wowing gamers and developers alike is the attention to detail which has effectively transformed the title. This is not just a simple graphical enhancement. According to Mikami-san, better textures are not enough. He wants to infuse the game with sensations through what he calls 'experienced realism'. Buzz words aside, this essentially means employing techniques which can better portray effects such as humidity, mist, clamminess and claustrophobia. By using animated backgrounds and graphical distortion methods Capcom hopes to make the

What has been wowing gamers and developers alike is the attention to detail which has effectively transformed the title

pre-rendered scenes appear to be 'alive'. Walls will swell, objects pulse. And in the train scene – also demonstrated – objects gently vibrate under the carriages' motion.

While Mikami-san's announcement stunned Japan, Shigeru Miyamoto's public endorsement of such explicit violence on GameCube was even more significant. Whatever the reality of Capcom's commitment to PS2, Mikami-san's belief that the GameCube is the only creative platform for his team may be the start of a swing in Nintendo's direction. The sheer speed at which the game is coming together is nothing short of remarkable.



The lighting effects complement the oppressive mood impressively. Water shimmers realistically while any chink of illumination helps exploration

Maximo

Capcom's US studio exhumes *Ghosts 'N Goblins* from its fetid grave and injects the ageing platformer with a dose of 21st century splendour







In classic videogame style, bosses are usually four times bigger than Maximo and boast loads of attacks – but they all have one specific weakness...



Every enemy has a specific flaw which can be exploited with different weapons and power-ups. The skeletons show off with a little swordplay flourish after every attack, leaving them vulnerable

When a western developer updates a Japanese coin-op classic, it is not always a cause for wild celebration. Hasbro's risible *Frogger* adaptations leap regrettably to mind. On hearing about *Maximo*, a 3D platformer 'inspired' by *Ghosts 'N Goblins* and developed in America, **Edge** felt a certain trepidation. To say the least.

But it seems the coin-op classic is in capable hands. For a start this is Capcom's own US studio – Capcom Digital – and not some megacorp toy company looking to create another lucrative licence. Plus, director of R&D **David Siller** is a true industry veteran. He cut his teeth working for Japanese developer Nichibutsu (creator of coin-op golden oldies *Crazy Climber* and *Moon Cresta*) and later designed levels for *Rygar* before moving on to the role of producer on *Crash Bandicoot*.

"My favourite coin-op game of all time is *Ghosts 'N Goblins*," he proclaims "Classic gameplay design doesn't go out of style. We wanted to recreate the whole thing, but with little tributes to the original games." Surprisingly, Capcom of Japan approved the project, thanks largely to legendary director of R&D Yoshiki Okamoto, who not only helped allocate funding for the project, but also brought beloved artist Susumu Matsushita on board to help visualise the game's Disney-meets-anime character designs.

On paper, *Maximo* looks fairly textbook: medieval setting, 30 levels across five worlds: a cemetery known as 'The Boneyard', a swamp dubbed 'The Great Dank', a frozen 'Graveyard of Ships', a fiery underworld called 'The Realm of Spirits', and Maximo's own siege-torn castle. Gameplay blends combat and platform jumping, with the player slaying

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **In-house**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4 (Japan) 2002 (UK)**





Elements of *Crash Bandicoot* and *Final Fantasy* are present respectively in the game's cartoon-style foliage and wild spell effects, but inspiration apparently comes from Disney and Sam Raimi





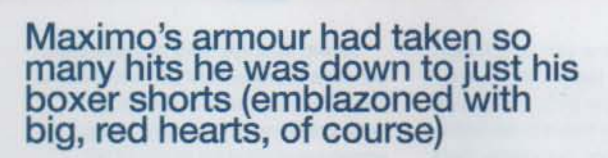


enemies, fighting bosses, and collecting coins and some 50 different power-ups. Surely game development by numbers?

Not exactly. There is an attention to detail here that is sadly lacking in most western 3D platformers. Matsushita's character designs, brought to life with cartoon-like animation, are filled with personality. The soundtrack expertly recalls the camp, 'spooky' music often played in carnival haunted houses, and the camera favours a horror movie-style off-kilter angle. (Indeed, the game's 'Creepy Cam' was inspired by the Sam Raimi flick 'Army Of Darkness'.) Siller also claims to have been inspired by amusement park 'dark rides' – pathed fun houses like Disney World's Pirates Of The Caribbean and Haunted Mansion. Their influence can be felt in the ever-twisting level layouts, which subtly channel the path of the free-roaming *Maximo* and yield plenty of corners around which to hide surprises.

Two minutes into a preview version, **Edge** was leaping around a haunted graveyard, hoarding coins, grabbing firefly-like bits of spirit and slashing away at every ghost, skeleton, and zombie in sight. At the end of it, Maximo's armour had taken so many hits he was down to just his boxer shorts (emblazoned with big, red hearts, of course). A comic reference to the original game.

"The devil is in the details," states lead designer **Scott Rogers**. Which explains why Maximo's sword clangs noisily off stone, but embeds itself in a tree trunk with a dull thunk. This organic approach naturally feeds into the gameplay in the form of elemental weapons. A flaming sword power-up proves potent in the ice world, while the ice sword is useful everywhere else, instantly freezing foes such as the piranha-spitting swamp zombie.



Maximo's armour had taken so many hits he was down to just his boxer shorts (emblazoned with big, red hearts, of course)

This dual emphasis on fundamental gameplay and attention to detail appear to have produced an eminently playable modern platformer. When complete, *Maximo* will hopefully serve as a reminder to studios chasing *Metal Gear Solid* and *Resident Evil* that an enjoyable experience doesn't necessarily mean hours of dialogue and beautifully motion-captured cut scenes. Classic game design ethics do have a place in the modern era and western developers have much to learn from the Japanese old school. Capcom Digital is one studio that's signed up for lessons.

Ghosts of gaming past

***Maximo* is heavily inspired by Capcom's 1985 sideways scroller *Ghosts 'N Goblins* (pictured right). Gone, however, is Arthur the knight and his quest to save the princess from a marauding demon. Here the story revolves around a king named Maximo who returns to his realm after a long war only to discover he has been usurped by the evil Achille, who then goes onto murder the titular monarch. However, when Achille begins to suck ectoplasmic spirit power from the underworld, Death reanimates Maximo to destroy him. The more spirits you return to Death, the more he rewards you with extra lives.**



Eternal Darkness

Nintendo forsakes its cute and cuddly reputation in favour of a tale of malevolent evil and failing sanity







A small selection of the 12 controllable characters available throughout *Eternal Darkness*



Part survival horror, part Lovecraftian epic, and part hack 'n' slash action, *Eternal Darkness* is the antithesis of the family-friendly image Nintendo has spent almost 20 years cultivating. Surprisingly, that's exactly what the company wants: with this project, Nintendo is finally making a serious bid for the more mature gamer. And instead of depending on excessive blood or gory fatalities, Canadian developer Silicon Knights has created a disturbing tale of lurking horror and fading sanity sure to appeal to people looking for a little more meat on their horror gaming experience.

Dismembering creatures may render them harmless, but just encourages other creatures to use more powerful magic attacks

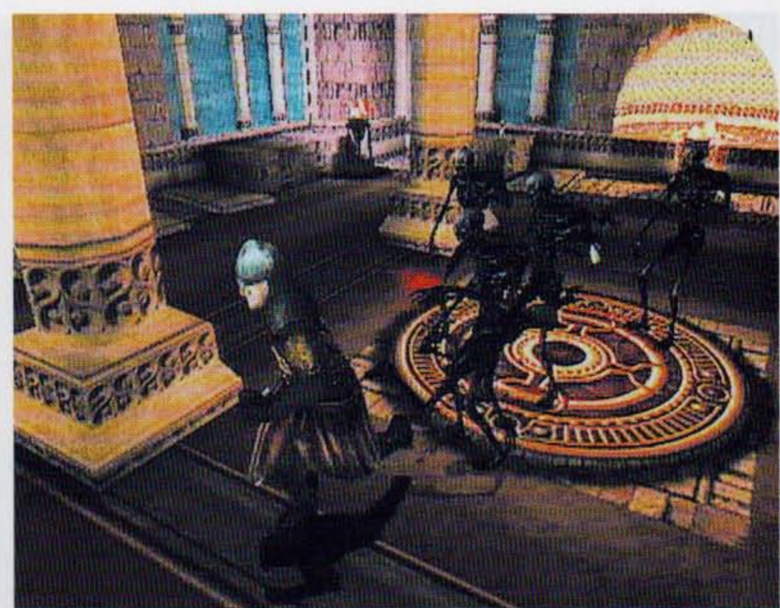
As with most epic tales, the game starts out with a seemingly smalltime turn of events. The player initially takes on the role of Alexandra Roivas, a headstrong young woman investigating the murder of her grandfather on the old family estate. Predictably, Alex soon finds herself embroiled in a much larger conflict involving a powerful ancient race that ruled the Earth long ago, madmen that seek to restore them to power, and the heroes that have carried the burden of saving the planet before her.

It's these heroes that provide *Eternal Darkness* with its most distinctive gameplay angle. You'll not only play as Alex, but as 11 other characters from the past as well. In what has to be regarded as an extremely ambitious (or possibly foolhardy) move, all 12 stories actually intertwine to tell one single epic tale of evil and redemption. Aside from Alex, other playable characters include the Roman Centurion Pious Augustus from 26 BC, Joseph De Molay, a Knight Templar of the year 195, and Ellia, a dancing slave girl from 12th-century Cambodia. Choices made by the player in one time period affect what happens in another, so you may well want to go back and replay the game to see what could have been, should you have decided differently at a critical juncture.

All the characters have their own complete storylines to play through and individual weapons and combat methods. Joseph, for example, wields a nasty mace, while Alex is privy to more modern weapons, like a shotgun. And despite the fact that each character has his/her own attacks, the combat interface is quite streamlined; hit the right analogue button and you'll target the nearest enemy. Then, depending on how you

Format: **GameCube**
Publisher: **Nintendo**
Developer: **Silicon Knights**
Origin: **Canada**
Release: **February 2002 (US) TBC (UK)**

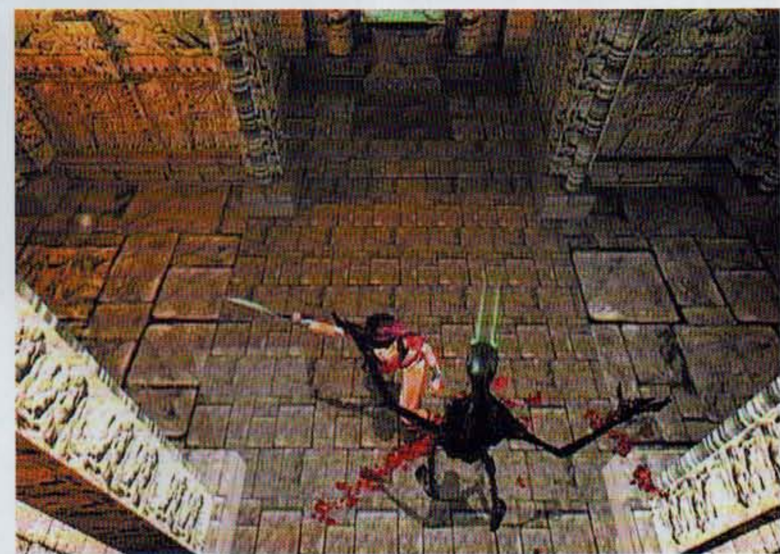








The graphics engine can make 16 different texture passes, for lighting, bump mapping etc, and still maintain a healthy 60fps. An intelligent camera system ensures the player always has a good view of their assailants



Running away (top) is one option to stay healthy, but eventually your character gets winded and has to stop. (Below) Each character has his or her own specialised set of combos during combat

push the joystick, you'll target certain body parts. Push up, for example, and you'll aim at the head, while left or right will take off an arm. A lot of the strategy in combat will be knowing which body parts are the best to hack off which creatures: dismembering creatures may render them harmless, but just encourages other creatures to use more powerful magic attacks.

Other than the combat, the game goes out of its way quite a bit to improve on its survival horror brethren. First of all, characters are always controlled directionally – up goes up, down goes down – instead of the relative (read 'quirky') *Resident Evil* control system. To complement these controls, Silicon Knights has also put a lot of work into creating a new camera system that not only helps enhance the mood but can do so without the annoying drawbacks of Capcom's traditional static camera system. The developer has created a fairly intelligent camera that remains static as you explore an area of a room, but also gently pans around any walls that get in your way, or locks at a distance to keep a monster in view. It even goes so far as to act differently if you enter the same room with or without enemies in it. The team has devoted a lot of time and effort to eliminating those pesky reversing camera angles and monsters that attack you from offscreen.

Eternal Darkness definitely represents a new, more psychological take on a videogame genre that has long been dominated by nothing but visceral horror. But as very little of the game has been shown thus far, it's difficult to predict whether or not the team will accomplish its lofty storytelling goals and deliver something that could be considered a true system-seller.

Sanity clause

The most innovative feature in the game (though one lifted entirely from RPG 'Call Of Cthuluhu') is also the one that could make or break it: the Sanity System. The idea is that the more you walk down this twisted psychological path without disposing of the enemies that confront you, the more your character's sanity will erode. It'll start off subtly: small hallucinations that you might just catch out of the corner of your eye, pictures watching you, or blood slowly dripping down the wall. As you become increasingly insane, the effects grow more dramatic: your head falls off as you enter a door and then, as you pick it up, it starts reciting Shakespeare. However, making short work of the enemies helps keep your marbles intact, as you retain your sense of power and thus your ability to rationalise the horrific world you've entered.

Civilization III

Format: PC
Publisher: Infogrames
Developer: Firaxis
Origin: US
Release: 16 November

Infogrames puts an end to the confusing multitude of updates with the true successor to Sid Meier's magnum opus





After some protracted legal wrangling concerning the rights to the series, confusion reigned in the PC strategy community as a number of competing *Civilization* franchises sat next to each other on store shelves. Purist Sid Meier fans were disappointed by *Call to Power*, while atavistic fans were left cold by the futuristic *Alpha Centauri*.

Now both groups can relax as the release of the first true successor to *Civilization II* draws near. It's not immediately clear what the major differences are between *Civilization III* and its true predecessor, but then Sid Meier's opus has never been one to wear its charms on its sleeve. Instead it demands and rewards sustained and involved play, and it's only after lengthy immersion that the numerous tweaks and revisions, and their impact on an already finely honed formula, become clear.

The most obvious change has been made to the interface. Eschewing the menu-driven system of previous episodes, there's an evident attempt here to implement the current vogue for simple and sparse PC screens. It's still bewildering, though. Indeed, if **Edge** holds any reservations about the game at this stage it's that Firaxis seems to have missed the opportunity to create an easy route to comprehend the game's many Byzantine subtleties.

Urban improvements

But that *is* the only reservation. Because after delving beyond initial impressions, *Civilization III* reveals itself to be a worthy successor. The major reworking is that the development of your civilisation's culture affords another route to beat the game: completing wonders and city improvements pays dividends in the long run as the influence of decorated cities subsumes those that are less enlightened. However, this isn't the only facet that's been changed. It's also no longer enough just to rely on an aggressively military expansionist approach. Even if such a strategy is adopted, it's essential that culture, trade and diplomacy aren't neglected. Taking over a city now results in the survival of an ethnic minority group, for example.

As well as the greater number of ways to beat the game, which still includes taking a rocket to Alpha Centauri, the game has also been improved by enhanced automation of tasks. Which is useful considering the increased industry required to improve the areas around cities and the survival of the technology tree. Given the inclusion of predefined scenarios, multiplayer modes and editing tools in the finished release, it's likely that, once again, countless man-hours will be lost to the tides of history.



A pared down city view is initially confusing for old hands, but eventually makes life a lot easier. Palace improvements have undergone a facelift, which makes citizen approbation all the more satisfying



The isometric viewpoint will be instantly familiar to anyone who has lost large parts of their life to *Civilization II*. But despite the obvious similarities, there are a number of major tweaks and revisions



Lying for the good of your country

Building on the impressive AI to be found in *Alpha Centauri*, the leaders of other civilisations prove frustratingly lifelike in their responses to Machiavellian duplicity, high cunning and crass backstabbing. So it's just as well that the diplomacy scheme is more sophisticated than before, enabling players to tailor exchanges with other leaders. Specific goods or information can be exchanged, and diplomatic alliances fashioned to specific needs. It's yet another element which broadens the original series' strategic horizons – and one you must consider well, whatever path to civilisation you take.

Baldur's Gate Dark Alliance

Format: **PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Interplay**
Developer: **Black Isle Studios**
Origin: **US**
Release: **Q4 (US) TBC (UK)**

Previously in **E98**

Black Isle Studios looks like it's doing a sterling job of translating this overtly PC title for PlayStation2, demonstrating an astounding level of attention to detail

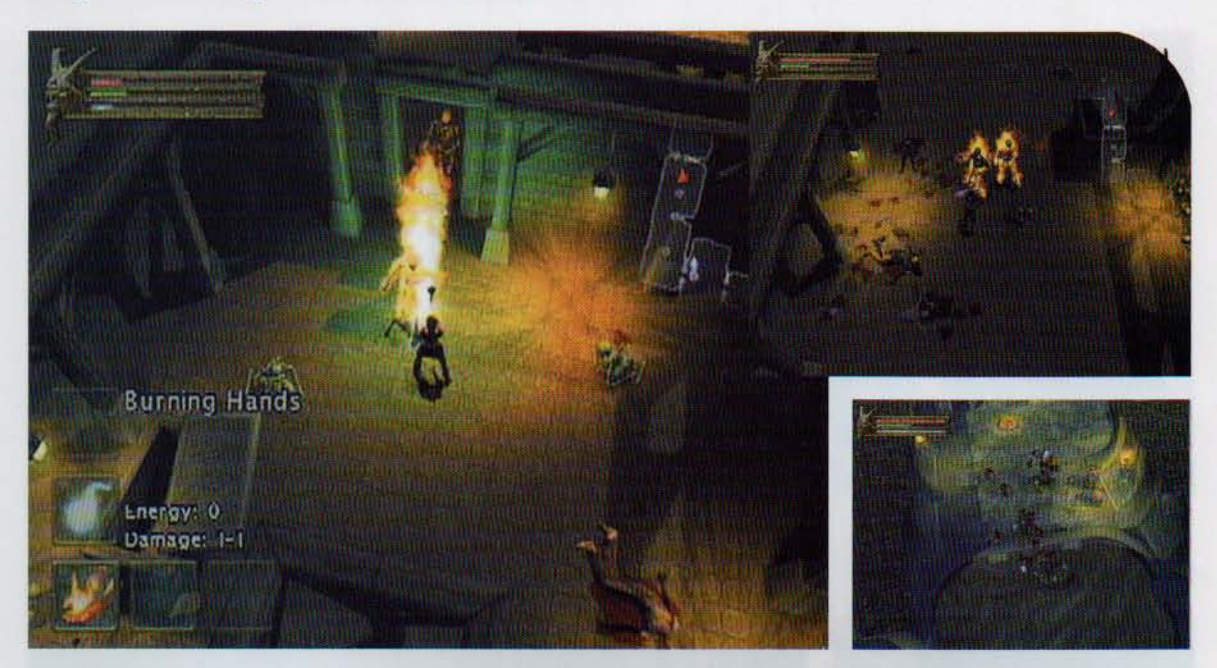
Perhaps surprisingly, the PlayStation2 incarnation of the hugely popular PC franchise, *Baldur's Gate*, was one of the more obvious manifestations of the technical capacities of Sony's hardware at E3 back in May. It's remarkable that a franchise so firmly rooted in the development environment of the PC should be home to such a sterling comprehension of the much-maligned PlayStation2 architecture.

Equally impressive, if the current preview code is anything to go by, is the way in which the sprawling and epic span of the series has been distilled into a resolutely console experience. The attention to detail is enormous, meriting all sorts of superfluous exploration. Realtime water effects are astonishing, proving at times to be a satisfying distraction, while torches give off a heat haze. Sound effects, from smashing crates and urns to the admonishments from characters unhappy about standing around, are equally gratifying. The most impressive elements in the mix though are probably the front end and in-game interface which do so much to conceal the overwhelming complexity of the underlying 'Dungeons & Dragons' mechanics, and lend an admirable ease of navigation.

From the inventory and levelling up screens to the load menus, every pertinent bit of game information is presented to the player in an obvious and intuitive way – again, it's surprising that the console development community could learn so much about their traditional strengths from a PC franchise.

Owing largely to the isometric viewpoint and hack 'n' slash mentality, the most obvious comparisons in terms of gameplay are *Diablo*, and given the twoplayer co-operative mode, *Gauntlet*. But *Dark Alliance* is distinguished from these titles by the sophistication of the tweaked 'D&D' ruleset underlying the surface simplicity. The ostensibly simple combat dynamic is lent a greater degree of sophistication by nuances in timing, and there's a greater potential for tailoring your character's abilities to different tactical approaches – ranging from hand-to-hand combat to long distance magic use.

While the environments are essentially linear dungeons, these are given greater scope thanks to the number of NPCs that might opt to offer sub-quest objectives, rewarding players who are willing to engage the local populace. Although preview code only contains the first part of the game, which takes place in the cellars and sewers beneath the city of Baldur's Gate, later chapters broaden the exploration across the diverse geography of the Forgotten Realms setting that will be familiar to both players of the PC series and the pen-and-paper game. Expect a review next issue.




RPG staples such as buxom barmaids look set to punctuate the hack 'n' slash action dynamic


Each of the three characters have particular strengths, which can be further refined during play


Swarming hordes of enemies and a co-operative twoplayer mode provoke memories of that coin-op classic, *Gauntlet* – albeit with a bit more sophistication, thanks to the underlying 'D&D' game mechanics

Scary monsters

While a lot of the monstrous ecology uncovered in the first part of *Dark Alliance* will be gratifyingly familiar to players of the first two chapters in the *Baldur's Gate* series, gamers who have cut their teeth with the original Wizards Of The Coast 'Dungeons & Dragons' game will also be pleased that some of the more obscure aspects of the pen-and-paper bestiary have been given digital life. So, joining giant rats, bugbear chieftains and whining kobolds are the likes of the gelatinous cube, splendidly realised containing the captured weaponry of previous, less fortunate adventurers.



Nezmix

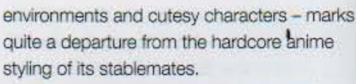
Format: Xbo
Publisher: Microsof
Developer: Media Visio
Origin: Japa
Release: Q1 200

The power of Xbox is employed in the creation of an army of furry rodents, though graphical novelty may prove to be all the title has going for it



Of the various titles announced at Microsoft's recent preview in Japan, one that showed particular promise was *Nezumi Kusu* – also known as *Nezmix* and which carries the suitably cheesy subtitle of 'Have A Mice Day' ('nezumi' is Japanese for mouse).

Nezmix is the warped offspring of Media Vision, the team previously responsible for *Wild Arms* (1 and 2), *Gunners Heaven* and *Crime Crackers* (1 and 2). As such, this new title – featuring detailed, photorealistic



environments and cutesy characters – marks quite a departure from the hardcore anime styling of its stablemates.

The player controls a mouse named Apollo, leader of a gang of mice who reside in a mid-Atlantic-styled abode. The group are intent on retaining control of the entire building by ridding it of rival rodent factions. Apollo is controlled directly, jumping around and climbing furniture, and is used to explore the surroundings, discover useful items and detect the presence of other mice.

Apollo's followers can be commanded and are then in turn driven by the computer's AI (images of *Pikmin*'s army of vegetables spring to mind). Sadly, Apollo isn't allowed the freedom to roam the 3D landscape; instead he travels a set route and at various points is allocated a task. This might involve moving an obstacle, for instance, at which point the cumulative strength of his furry comrades is brought to bear.

The end of the level is reached when Apollo and crew locate a group of enemy mice, whereupon a small-scale battle ensues. The player manipulates Apollo directly, while his buddies are free to do their own thing.

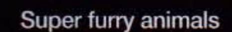
Nezmix is illustrative of Microsoft's strategy to deliver original titles that feature elements unique to the Xbox – hence the fur shading. Though whether the game lives up to the expectation of the screenshots remains to be seen. It received something of a mixed reception in Japan, in part due to the lacklustre animation, and also its general appearance, which is a far cry from 'kawai' – the oriental definition of cute.







At first glance, *Nezmix*'s screenshots promise a free-roaming 3D adventure, but the gameplay may end up being a much more linear affair



Super furry animals

One of the more intriguing aspects of *Nezmix* – and one sure to garner widespread interest – is its use of 'fur shading' to create convincing mice. Unlike the geometric techniques used by offline 3D rendering systems, this realtime process – pioneered by Jed Lengyell of Microsoft Research – involves the layering of concentric semi-transparent and procedurally textured 'shells' one on top of another such that the dot textures line up, effectively creating hair cross-sections. The process doesn't create continuous hair strands as such, but the resultant 'fuzz' is convincing enough.

Intrinsic to this technique is the successful management of level of detail, ensuring that the system doesn't waste resources rendering unnecessary textures. At small distances more texture shells are used to maintain the fur density – with an overhead of between 4 and 16 times normal rendering. As the object's distance from the camera increases, the number of shells is reduced until it's eventually simplified into a single, solid texture map.



Maximum Chase

Format: **Xbox**
Publisher: **Microsoft Japan**
Developer: **Genki**
Origin: **Japan**
Release: **2002**

Genki's stylish car romp features 20 real world models, wrapped in the kind of spectacular 3D visuals that are fast becoming the Xbox trademark

Guns and cars. Women and shoot-outs. Its the purity of this formula which makes *Maximum Chase* such a thrilling prospect. Let's face it, the wafer-thin plot is shoehorned in just to string the chase sequences together. The player takes on the role of Rick, an LA police inspector, going about his daily business – until a flustered women flags down his car asking for help. Then the desert horizon explodes with vehicles. The chase is on.

Footage shown at a recent Microsoft press conference in Japan unveiled two distinct phases. The first is a dramatic car chase sequence through the Hollywood boulevards, with a good level of 3D modelling, combined with rich textures, accurately recreating the atmosphere of downtown Tinseltown. Both gangsters and police eventually take up the pursuit – although how the plot accommodates this turn of affairs wasn't revealed. Car deformation was in evidence, both from collisions with scenery and bullets spraying from the enemies behind. Guardrails and fences buckling as vehicles swung into them also added to the genuine sense of drama and panic.

Guns out

The second phase of *Maximum Chase* is a gun-shooting sequence in which players get the opportunity to destroy vehicles on their tail. Genki was at pains to emphasise the level of realism involved here. For example, it will be possible to shoot at tyres to slow down an enemy car, or make it crash into another vehicle. Another highly imaginative touch is that you can target and shoot barrels to cause even more mayhem in your wake. Currently, the targeting control is a little erratic, leaving gameplay somewhat frustrating, but there's still time for the developer to improve this.

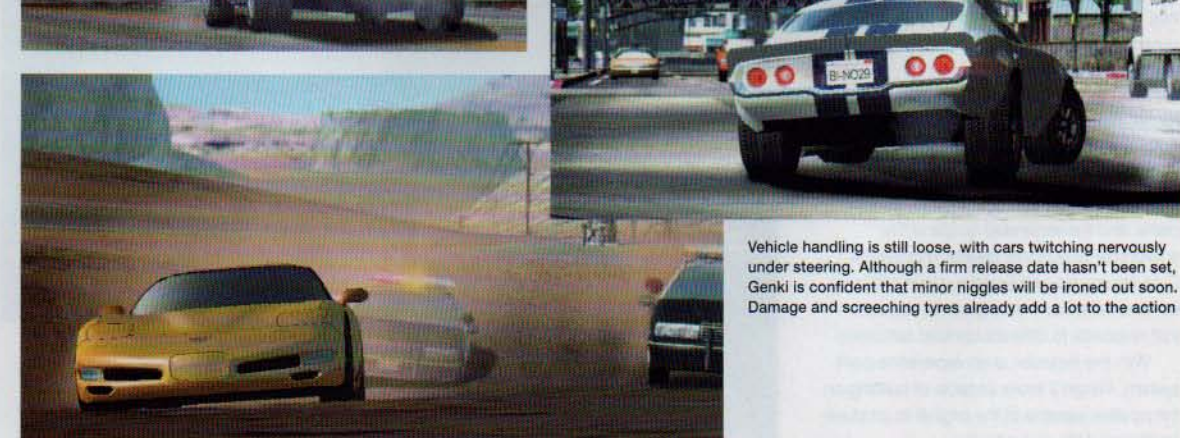
More impressive, though, are the car models on display. At least 20 real world vehicles will be available to drive, with official licences coming from motor stalwarts GM, Toyota and Nissan. Both classic and modern cars should make it to the final cut – and, in a rare move, Genki has obtained the manufacturer's permission to deform the shiny bodywork of all the vehicles included. Hopefully, this will set a precedent for other manufacturers to follow in the future.

While Genki's past driving efforts – which include *Tokyo Xtreme Racer* (known as *Tokyo Highway Battle* in the UK) – have a cult following in the East, its numerous franchises have fared less well in America and Europe. Perhaps the move to the desert strips and Hollywood hills of the LA landscape will inject a touch more passion into this title, and make it more inviting to Western players. The emphasis on adrenaline-fuelled chases rather than clinical motorway racing is certainly a welcome one.









Vehicle handling is still loose, with cars twitching nervously under steering. Although a firm release date hasn't been set, Genki is confident that minor niggles will be ironed out soon. Damage and screeching tyres already add a lot to the action



Maximum Chase's emphasis will be firmly on the side of high-octane action and dramatic explosions

Zan Kabuki



Format: Xbo
Publisher: Genk
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: 200

Genki mines the rich seam of Japanese history to produce another historically-themed beat 'em up for Xbox, set in Sengoku Age Japan







It currently looks a little unfinished in terms of visual splendour, but the unique Kabuki theatre setting of *Zan Kabuki* adds some intriguing concepts to the tried and tested beat 'em up genre. Chief among these is that combat has to be conducted in the most histrionic manner possible, in order to curry audience support. There's also an element of troupe management

Based on its experience developing the historically-themed beat 'em up, *Kengo*, Genki has turned its attention to another period and platform to produce an intriguing interpretation of the genre. *Zan Kabuki*, which will appear on Xbox, is set in Sengoku Age Japan and requires players to guide a Kabuki theatre troupe from Edo (modern day Tokyo) to Kyoto, overcoming rivals on the way. In a bid to demonstrate thespian superiority, players control a team of three actors, in combat bouts that bear outward resemblance to those featured in titles such as *Tekken Tag Tournament*.

What distinguishes this title is its unique setting, and the fact that popularity with the audience is always of paramount importance. Consequently, hitting an opponent with an extravagant combo, or taking a theatrical fall after getting hit, is rewarded with an increase in audience esteem – resulting in more cash to make that journey to Kyoto a little bit easie

In another bid to recreate the realities of the performing arts in 16th century Japan, the game features an element of troupe management, enabling you to poach star performers from rival companies. Although recent footage was a bit rough around the edges, it's a fascinating prospect for the more antiquarian gamer.

Kengo 2

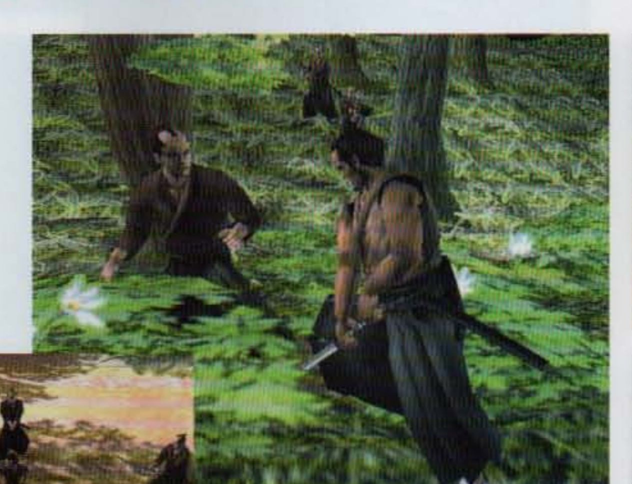
Format: Xbo
Publisher: Genk
Developer: In-hous
Origin: Japa
Release: Q2 200

The follow-up to the PlayStation2 samurai simulator treads familiar ground, but boasts expanded environments, more enemies – and more choice

As the spiritual successor to the popular *Bushido Blade* series, *Kengo* was often criticised for sacrificing the one-hit kill dynamic of its predecessor in favour of a health bar. Critics argued that this diluted the purity of a game which had truly reflected the vicissitudes of samurai combat. In its favour, though, *Kengo* did include a comprehensive dojo structure to train characters in the Way of Bushido. Indeed, it's this aspect of *Kengo* that's been expanded upon for the sequel.

Accordingly, the game takes on a more action-orientated hue, with the player's itinerary to different dojo constantly interrupted by bands of enemies that, sometimes, you must fight all at once. In order to facilitate this group combat, the fighting style has been reworked to introduce increased tactical sophistication in the 3D plane, and the expanded scope of the environments acquires greater importance. Over the course of the game, players face 30 samurai warriors, with a dynamic narrative that responds to different combat outcomes.

With the inclusion of an experience point system, *Kengo 2* looks capable of building on the positive aspects of the original to produce another realistic and reflective exposition of the Bushido arts.







Expanded environments, frequently peopled with a multitude of opponents, distinguish *Kengo 2* from its immediate predecessor. In particular, the number of onscreen opponents has prompted a shift in combat style – now there is a greater emphasis on attacking in all directions, resulting in an experience which works more fundamentally in three dimensions



Soul Calibur 2

The original *Soul Calibur* was seriously wounded by its revolutionary adoption of true 3D movement, turning off massmarket beat 'em up fans in the process. Edge talks to the man behind the series, and finds that the soul still burns

When Namco announced that it was to produce a version of its weapon-based beat 'em up, *Soul Calibur*, for the Dreamcast, few people could have anticipated the awe-inspiring results that would be fashioned from a coin-op original not known for setting benchmarks for the genre. Yet a comprehensive reworking of the source code set standards of technical excellence and exhaustively involving gameplay that still overshadow the vast majority of titles of any genre available on any hardware platform today.

Now, having announced that the sequel will appear on all three major home consoles, the weight of expectation is predictably huge, but Namco has decided to focus its attention on producing the successor on its own System 246 arcade board before returning to the console fray. To find out how the company intends to match the impressive achievements of its predecessor, **Edge** spoke to **Hiroaki Yotoriyama**, the producer and director of development on the title, who was also involved with *Tekken 2*, *Soul Edge*, *Tekken 3* and the original *Soul Calibur* after joining Namco from university.





A few familiar faces will return in the sequel to *Soul Calibur*. The likes of Ivy and Mitsurugi (above) will also be joined by a few new ones, though Namco is reluctant to offer details

Nobody was more surprised by the success of the original home console version of *Soul Calibur* than Yotoriyama-san himself. After all, the coin-op title upon which it was based had fared poorly in the arcades, due not only to the general unpopularity of weapon-based beat 'em ups, but also to the constraints of a rushed development schedule. Many of the features that the team had originally



Format: **Coin-op, GameCube, Xbox, PlayStation2**
Publisher: **Namco**
Developer: **In-house**
Release: **Q4 2001 (coin-op)**
Origin: **Japan**

Photography: **Hiroki Izumi**



The development team is adamant that the sequel will be optimised for all four of the hardware platforms on which it is being developed, without being hamstrung by any of their particular weaknesses. Early shots bode well for the title

wanted to include had to be left out of the coin-op version, and those that were included proved to be somewhat incomprehensible to gamers schooled in *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* combat.

DC had so much Soul

"For the original *Soul Calibur* we had a terrible schedule and we were working on the game until the very last minute," explains Yotoriyama-san. "We just released it when we had the game working properly, so there were a lot of features that had to be left out. We simply didn't have the time to implement all of the features that were originally envisaged." The console version, though, showed a marked improvement. "When we had to make the conversion for Dreamcast we started to think about delivering a better version knowing that the arcade version wasn't widely well-received," he says. "We were surprised by the Dreamcast as it was quite powerful and we are sure we gave the platform a game that nobody would have thought technically possible on the console. We were surprised ourselves by what we were able to do, and we're still quite proud of the version. When I went to the US, the game was still being demonstrated in stores long after it was released. When I spoke with some American developers they told me I was great, even though at that time I was thinking that they were great, not me."

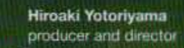
The reason for such adulation is that the development team went back almost to first principles to make the Dreamcast version superior in every way to the coin-op. The result was almost unrecognisable in visual terms. More importantly it introduced an extensive oneplayer mode, which both increased the game's longevity and introduced players to every single nuance and technique that needed to be mastered in order to fully appreciate the game's tactical subtleties. "I think that the coin-op original is appreciated mainly by hardcore gamers, and not by casual gamers as I had hoped," agrees Yotoriyama-san. "People who understood the game mechanics enjoy *Soul Calibur* for a long period of time. There were a few features that were too innovative, and I think users had difficulties understanding the game – I speak about the arcade version. *Soul Calibur*, in many aspects, was very different compared to other 3D beat 'em ups, especially terms of tempo and management of the 3D environment. So it was obvious to me that the game suffered from a lack of explanation, or tutorials. We fixed that for the Dreamcast version, which is one of the fundamental reasons for its success. With the console version we added the Mission Battle mode, which allowed people to understand how *Soul Calibur* works, so they were able to familiarise themselves with the game commands and tactics. That is the major reason that *Soul Calibur* has not been able to compete with *Tekken*."

Perhaps, though, this will change with *Soul Calibur 2*. The sequel

The imposing figure of Nightmare will also return for the sequel, which is first being developed for Namco's PlayStation2-based coin-op architecture, the System 246 board









Hiroaki Yotoriyama
producer and director

provides Yotoriyama-san and his team the opportunity to implement the features and improvements that had to be left out the first time around. In particular, he is keen to maintain the accessibility achieved with the console version: "We want a large proportion of the public to enjoy *Soul Calibur 2* and I think we have managed this time to design the game accordingly. For the sequel we want to deliver a game which will be immediately fun. It has to be fun, but players have to understand it immediately, and we want it to be fun to watch. Pure fun is our objective. So I travel a lot from one location test to another and I like to watch players in action. It helps me to have a greater understanding of what is seen as fun from a user's point of view."

On the run

One of the major achievements of the original *Soul Calibur* was that, unlike most other '3D' beat 'em ups, it unlocked the third plane of movement. "Most 3D beat 'em ups are still confined to two dimensions – both fighters are located in the same plane," posits Yotoriyama-san. "When we introduced the run feature in the first *Soul Calibur* we wanted to break this rule and make the gameplay evolve, but we weren't

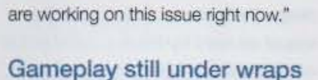
"We want a large proportion of the public to enjoy *Soul Calibur 2* and I think we have managed this time to design the game accordingly"

entirely successful. Running was not very easy to do in the previous version and so lacked impact, but in the sequel it is simple to perform. In *Soul Calibur 2* it is one of the core features during a fight. For the sequel we are making commands easier to handle so people won't need as much explanation. We will also use the new characters to introduce some of these evolutions."

Indeed much of the speculation that has so far surrounded the *Soul Calibur 2* announcement has concerned which of the 19 characters will be returning. In particular, the unveiling of a Sophitia lookalike seemed to suggest that a few familiar faces will be in place, but in fact it turns out that the character is Sophitia's sister, Cassandra. "We wanted to keep Sophitia's model but make it sufficiently different," he explains. "I know Sophitia's fans might start to complain, but I think Cassandra should fit into the series. I'm thinking of including about ten characters – not including hidden ones, as I still haven't determined how many of these there will be and how they will actually fit into the game process. These characters will include new ones. I fear fans might be surprised, but I think these new characters will fit perfectly, providing *Soul Calibur* with a fresh dynamism – new moves and a new tempo. We are working on this issue right now."

Gameplay still under wraps

Apart from the character roster, Namco is reluctant to discuss the game modes that will be featured in the sequel, arguing that it is too early to do so, but Yotoriyama-san has raised the possibility of the arcade version incorporating Sega-style network play or memory card systems. One thing that he was keen to rule out, though, is the inclusion of the sorts of interactive environments that characterise titles such as *Dead Or Alive*: "Yes, such propositions emerged during the development and I did have a few thoughts about this matter, but no. When you talk about 3D beat 'em ups, you have to talk about *Tekken* and *Virtua Fighter* – they're the ones that started it all. We are used to their mechanics. Interactive arenas confuse the action. Fighting games are about

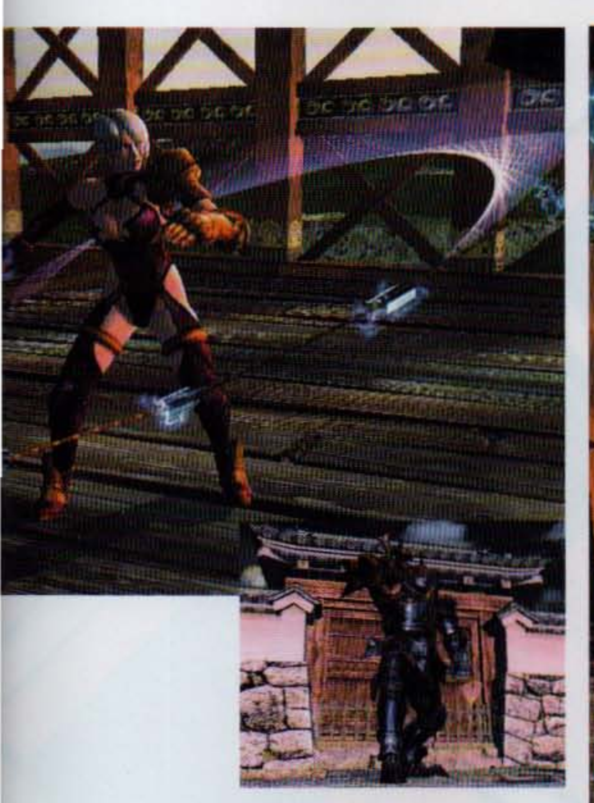








Despite the highly detailed and varied environments that have been displayed from the game so far, Yotoriyama-san is clear that they will not feature interactive elements, claiming that this would dilute the purity of the genre and interrupt the tactical fluidity of the game



Graphical effects appear to be every bit as sophisticated as those of the original title



two fighters confronting each other. There is no need for more than this."

Despite the lack of gameplay details that are forthcoming, Yotoriyama-san proves more talkative when it comes to the technical challenge faced by a team charged with developing the sequel for four different hardware platforms. "It won't be easy every day," he admits, "but I think it is a question of organisation. We are focused on the arcade version at this moment. Our problem is that the consumer versions have been announced before the arcade. We are aiming to release the arcade version first, hopefully this year. We will consider the release schedule of the various home console versions after we have finished the arcade version, but the head of Namco is already asking me to release the three console versions at the same time, so the coming months look horrible for us."

One of the challenges that the team has to overcome is the particular strengths and weaknesses of each platform. Despite the poor performance of the System 246 board at this year's JAMMA exhibition, the development team is adamant that it will prove powerful enough to form the basis of all four versions of the title. Indeed Yotoriyama-san is optimistic that there will be little or no variation between the different versions of *Soul Calibur 2*: "When you see all the versions in front of you I hope you won't notice any difference. I want to stress, though, that we are not developing this game based on the limits or weaknesses of each platform. For the arcade version we're trying to get the most out of the System 246 board in terms of power and graphics. Then we would consider the strengths of the different consoles.

"We've already looked at GameCube, Xbox and PlayStation2, so we know what level of accomplishment we can target. We are using the arcade version as the core of the future conversions. We don't intend to make customised versions for each console based on their strong points – one console might be able to deliver a huge number of polygons, for example, but we won't design special backgrounds for this console. We would prefer to focus on the gameplay. I really want gamers on any platform to be fully satisfied with the game."

If the sequel comes anywhere near the standards of videogame perfection set by its predecessor, it seems unlikely he'll be disappointed.



It will be interesting to see how the newer characters will be integrated; the overall balance of playing styles and character strengths was one of the highlights of the original


Auto Race
Microvision
Game & Watch (Lion)
WonderSwan
Simon
Atari Lynx
Coleco Total Control
Game Boy
Quickshot Supervision
Neo Geo Pocket
Game Gear
Year
Game quality
Screen quality
Collectability
Battery life
Portability

Portable Pleasure: Handheld Generations

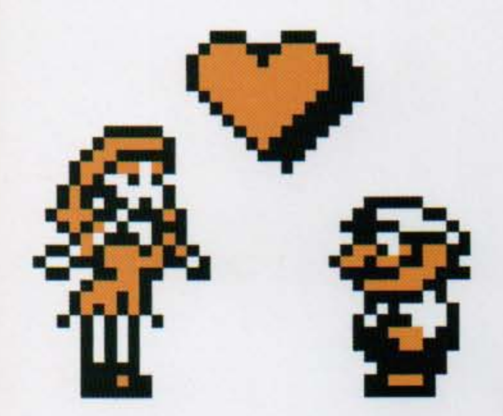
From simple LED devices to the current range of mobile phones, portable gaming remains a fiercely competitive arena, boasting only one true dominant force: Nintendo. Edge examines the genesis of the handheld and looks to the future of portable electronic plastic

Forget Bushnell and Atari. Forget *Computer Space*. Forget Tomohiro Nishikado's *Space Invaders*. The videogame industry – as a mass entertainment phenomenon – began in 1976. This was the year Mattel introduced Missile Attack, a slim, calculator-sized handheld game employing LEDs to simulate the movement of incoming missiles. There were initial problems when NBC refused to air ads for the toy, fearing that kids would be traumatised if they failed to protect the tiny city outline from the tiny red missiles. But when the name was changed to Space Alert: Battlestar Galactica the product was a big success, prompting Mattel to produce two follow-ups: Auto Race and the hugely popular Football, which went









on to sell more than two million copies in two years.

A new industry was born. Companies flooded into the market, at first replicating Mattel's primitive LED-based games, but then progressing to superior LCDs. This was the early '80s, the dawn of the electronic entertainment age, and because of the portability of handheld games, they were the coolest way in. Kids couldn't drag a VCS or Apple II into the schoolyard, but they could whip Astro Wars or Caveman out of their satchels at playtime and become instant celebs. And the cute good looks of these bleeping plastic boxes meant even girls liked them.

Kids couldn't drag a VCS or Apple II into the schoolyard, **but they could whip Astro Wars or Caveman out of their satchels** at playtime and become instant celebs

Unsurprisingly, they still have fans, with dozens of Web sites dedicated to collecting classic machines. Aficionado **Jaro Gielens**, who runs the excellent www.handhelden.com and produced a beautiful book on his passion ('Electronic Plastic' ('Die Gestalten Verlag') – every **Edge** reader should have a copy) explains: "With handhelds it's the different case design and technical variations that make them interesting. These games are beautiful even when not switched on. I have some 550 different games now, and I'm still not done. For me, all Bandai Electronics games are favourites. They have the same high overall quality standards like Nintendo's Game & Watch series, but with much more original game ideas. They also experimented a lot with different kinds of display constructions and case designs, whereas Nintendo played it safe with proven successful games, and only marginal design variations in case design."

On the subject of Nintendo, the handheld market is where the company cut its teeth as a home entertainment provider. The legendary Game & Watch series, which debuted in 1980 with *Ball*, provided gamers with little more than a variety of clever reaction tests. However, these desirable items fulfilled the goal of providing quirky gameplay in tiny packets with no need for controllers or add-ons. They also introduced the concept of the D-pad and brought the delights of *Donkey Kong* and *Mario Bros* to a wider audience. Between 1980 and 1991, Nintendo created some 59 G&W titles, adding widescreen, dual-screen and colour titles to the repertoire; without this beachhead in the market, it's almost certain that Game Boy would never have been developed.

Arguably, it was the lowly handheld as much as the Atari VCS which injected videogaming into the kiddie consciousness. And while parents watched on with detached amusement as their children lost hours transfixed in front of the TV with *Wizard Of Wor* and *Yar's Revenge*, the Game & Watch series and their ilk were accessible to all. A significant factor when you consider how many must have been bought by adults for their kids' birthdays.

The Game Boy effect

But portable electronic plastic had had its day. As home consoles made the leap to cartridge-based near coin-op quality hardware, and as the home computer market exploded with far more tempting software, so the handheld scene went into decline. In the latter half of the '80s only Bandai and Nintendo were still manufacturing portable systems, which seems an odd time for Nintendo to embark on a major



The first electronic handheld game went on sale in August 1976 via the Sears catalogue. Early sales were scuppered by NBC's refusal to air commercials on account of the game's depiction of the New York skyline beset by missiles. Ironically, if ads of the limited LED game were to be aired today, they would no doubt suffer a similar fate.

1976 Missile Attack



1977 Auto Race



A gear stick (of sorts) and a fetching vehicle thumbpad did wonders for Mattel's follow-up to Missile Attack. A secret speed controller inside the machine is one of the first examples of a difficulty setting on a videogame.

Supported with an expensive advertising campaign, this bleeping box of tricks drove parents and pets to distraction. MB Games' pocket version (re-branded Pocket Senso in the UK) came soon after. The memory test gameplay has been adopted by titles as diverse as *Dragon's Lair* and *Shenmue*.

1979 Simon



1979 MicroVision



Designed by Jay Smith, who later went on to develop the Vectrex, the MicroVision was the first ever LCD cart-based system. While there was some early success (it grossed $8m in its first year), the device suffered largely from a lack of support, with Milton Bradley only releasing two more carts after its launch.

While Game & Watch titles offered nothing more than binary style win/lose gameplay, the neat packaging and tactile rubber buttons ensured that gravel-strewn playgrounds across the land bleeped to their monotone tunes. First released in 1981, the Game & Watch series remained popular until 1991 with the release of *Mario the Juggler*.

1981 Game & Watch







handheld offensive. But that's exactly what it did.

The release of Game Boy in 1989 changed the gaming landscape forever – just as the NES had done five years before. Here, finally, was truly portable cart-based gaming – and it was practical, too, with four AA-sized cells providing more than 30 hours of play. Even the product's limitations worked in its favour. The lack of processing power (an 8bit variant on the Z80 CPU) forced developers to concentrate on raw game design – the perfect example being the legendary conversion of *Tetris*. Similarly, the yellow-tinged monochrome screen, with its crisp 160 x 144 resolution was a limited canvas, but it invited really cute, innovative 2D art.

And, of course, videogame history is littered with titles which have transcended the limitations of the host hardware, inspiring creatives to explore avenues of gameplay and visuals when the technology would seem to stretch no further. Let's face it: PlayStation characters like Spyro and Crash have never really touched the heart like the inhabitants of *Super Mario Land* or *Tiny Toons*.

Ian Baverstock, of Kuju Entertainment, underlines the machine's impact: "Game Boy is tremendously important on two scores: first, the enormous numbers sold have made it a part of popular culture in a way that only PSone comes close to for a dedicated games platform. Second, the presence of Pokémon and the full stable of Nintendo characters has continued to attract kids into gaming and continued to put games at the heart of youth culture."

Importantly, Game Boy remained a symbol of gameplay over graphics for a decade. Early competitors such as the Atari Lynx and Sega Game Gear should have blown GB away with their large screens and colour graphics, but with those luxuries came crippling levels of power consumption. Lynx needed a new set of batteries every five hours – imagine trying to complete *Pokémon* on that. Even GBA, with its lack of a backlight, is forced to compromise, but it's a compromise worth making. Handheld consoles are about convenience. Mobility affords gamers the opportunity to get a fix away from their primary consoles. Portability was, unfortunately, the last consideration for too many handheld console designers.

And just as the industry started to flag once more, NCL stepped back in with Game Boy Advance, which has totally revitalised handheld gaming – not only in sales terms, but in the energy and excitement it has generated. Developers may well be going retro crazy at the moment (an alarming proportion of GBA games are remakes and remixes), but new, more innovative titles are in development. The GBA fourplayer link-up capability – which in certain cases generously only requires one player to own the game – makes multiplayer gaming a cheap and accessible reality. This technology will be central to GBA development in the coming years. It will have to be, because for the first time in its history Nintendo is facing a real rival to its portable throne.

Breaking barriers

Currently, mobile gaming outside of Japan is limited to either the very simple 'built-in' games, such as Nokia's *Snake* and *Space Impact*, or the even simpler text and still-image games available to WAP phone users via the Internet. Delivering the latter provides the most obvious business model for thirdparty developers, but there are two immediate restrictions on what they can produce: the technical limitations of contemporary handsets with their monochrome screens and limited processors, and the bandwidth limitations of the current WAP network. This makes downloading even the smallest



The most successful videogame format ever created, Nintendo's handheld has been an industry mainstay since its launch in 1989. Built around a humble 8bit 6502 processor, running at a tad over 4MHz and powered by four AA batteries, the Game Boy was wonderfully practical. It was designed to be suitable for extended play, and became the perfect travel companion. *Tetris* remains the format's most compulsive piece of software, although others – the *Super Mario Land* games, Link's Game Boy adventures and the *Pokémon* titles, to name but a few – have come close to replicating *Tetris'* timeless qualities. These releases have proven that you can conjure up compelling gameplay from even the lowest resolution of display (the Game Boy's screen is made up of just 160 x 144 pixels).

A still more practical and stylish successor to the Game Boy arrived in 1996 in the form of the Game Boy pocket. This took the original's formula and refined it by offering a crisper screen and a lighter, more portable design. Game Boy Light, a Game Boy pocket with a brightly backlit screen, appeared in Japan in 1998, although sales were merely ordinary. The importance of this cannot be overstated: had Game Boy Light performed better at retail, and had people reacted to its arrival with more excitement, it could have encouraged Nintendo to adopt backlit displays in its future iterations. The perceived holy grail, a Game Boy with a screen capable of displaying colour (a Sharp-built 2.3-inch LCD display), also arrived in 1998. With the Game Boy Color came the definitive version of *Tetris*, suffixed '*DX*', and further triple-A software such as *Super Mario Bros. DeLuxe* and colour *Mario Golf* and *Tennis* soon followed.

Finally, in 2001, the Game Boy hardware (on which its successors were also based) was properly updated with the release of the Game Boy Advance. The likes of *Mario Kart Advance* and *F-Zero Advance* are sure evidence of this overhaul's worth.

Basically a portable PC Engine, the GT was ridiculously high-specced for a handheld. This was reflected in its price: ¥49,000, which put the device firmly into the realm of Neo Geo elitism. Though this was nothing compared to the PC Engine LT: whereas the GT was a genuine handheld console, the LT was more in the style of the PSone, a laptop of sorts with a controller port as standard.

Since the GT and LT both adopted HuCards as their standard medium, they shared a software library with NEC's darling of 8bit consoles, the PC Engine. A vast array of classic HuCards – from *Bomberman '94* to *Parasol Stars* to *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* – were therefore available. The systems' appeal was obvious. NEC's GT was released in the West as the TurboExpress, although its performance Stateside was undermined by NEC's handling of the PC Engine market there. Neither the GT nor the LT were particularly practical as portables, either. You could link together two PC Engine GTs for twoplayer frolics, but the console was too big and too heavy to be played on the move. Without a doubt, these were luxurious systems: the GT's active matrix screen, at a resolution of 400 x 270, gave an impossibly clear and bright display – but the ever practical Game Boy went on to prove that practicality and portability would always be more important than a power-hungry top spec. As collector's items today, though, the GT and LT are charming.

1981 Coleco Total Control



1989 PC Engine GT



1989 Game Boy







text games a slow and rather haphazard procedure.

The present mobile game scene is teeming with small developers offering downloadable quiz games, card games and electronic pets. As far as the developers themselves are concerned, this isn't a problem. UK outfit nGame, for example, is aiming titles like movie tie-in *Top Gun* at people who wouldn't usually go anywhere near a console. Like the manufacturers of those classic pre-Game Boy handhelds, nGame is banking on the fact that these games don't have to offer *Final Fantasy*-esque longevity. They're mere digital snacks. As **Enda Carey**, Marketing Manager at iFone asserts: "Gaming on wireless devices is there to kill dead time when you're travelling, waiting or bored, and we see it very much as snacking for ten to 15 minutes at a time. We're aiming at a market that want to 'snack', but don't want to carry around two or three different devices at a time."

"Gaming on wireless devices is there **to kill dead time when you're travelling, waiting or bored**, and we see it very much as snacking for ten to 15 minutes at a time"

But while these limited, latency-infested WAP snacks are fascinating to mobile fetishists with plenty of money and patience, they're not particularly appealing to gamers. Fortunately, big changes are just over the horizon. Later this year, the first handsets designed to exploit the new GPRS (General Packet Radio Service) network technology are due to appear.

Packets of fun

Unlike WAP, which works like a traditional modem and ties up all your phone's resources for the duration of the call, GPRS is a packet-switching system, enabling data to be down and uploaded quickly in bite-sized chunks. At the moment this means that if you're, say, playing online chess, you don't have to be online all the time racking up an immense phone bill: the game itself can be downloaded and you only send data when you make a move. GPRS is also 'always on', so you don't have to wait ages to actually connect to a server, one of the key nightmares with WAP. You'll also be able to download data in the background while you're doing other things with the phone.

While the prospect of cheap online chess is still not particularly arousing, the fast data exchange rates offered by this technology should be. GPRS could be the first step toward what all mobile game developers see as their major ambition: realtime multiplayer gaming. Or, as Eidos Technical Director **Simon Protheroe** puts it, clearing aside all that arcane wireless



Atari's fabled Lynx was technically far superior to Nintendo's monochromatic Game Boy, yet it was an unwieldy beast, requiring six AA batteries to power five hours of play. Still, the device was innovative. It could be flipped so left-handed players could play it, the screen could be vertically operated for some games, and its bright 3.5-inch display, with a resolution of 160 x 102, looked the part. There was also the ComLynx unit, a multiplayer link-up device which enabled up to eight players to compete with each other.

Its 8/16bit architecture (the Lynx was powered by an 8bit processor running at 16MHz, coupled with a 16bit graphics chip) belied the quality of the games, though. Lynx software was neither remarkable nor memorable, *California Games* being perhaps the most polished title for the system. *Batman Returns* was an early signal of how poor licensed games could be when the eye fell on the pound rather than the player, while old arcade conversions from Atari provided the majority of the Lynx's handful of good games.

The Lynx II, in a similar manner to the Mega Drive II and other such hardware 'sequels', added little to Atari's console, but for a slightly smaller build. Lacklustre thirdparty support was the Lynx's undoing, however, and what had been designed as a top-end system soon found itself sidelined to bargain bins, with little to save it from obsolescence. A bit of portable Jaguar, then.

Sega's Game Gear was a portable Master System of sorts, and afflicted by many of the problems that still dog colour portables to this day. Its 3.2-inch screen was of dodgy repute, despite boasting 160 x 146 resolution, and, worse still, the system guzzled energy like there was no tomorrow. As with the Lynx, the Game Gear had a palette of 4,096 colours, though only 32 could be displayed at once (still 16 more than Atari's system could muster).

But the Game Gear wasn't all bad: it had a vast selection of games, many of which were highly enjoyable. And you could play Master System titles with the help of a chunky plug-in converter, while a TV adaptor could transform the device into a portable television.

Sonic the Hedgehog was a competently ported take on the Master System version, but the Game Gear's first killer app was *Columns*, an addictive puzzle game in the classic *Puyo Puyo* mould. Supported by Sega's prolific development teams, the Game Gear certainly wasn't shor of quality software – it was privy to plenty of Master System and Mega Drive ports, after all – but original content was lacking.

It was Sega's handling of the Game Gear itself that was particularly irritating, though. The handheld was significantly more expensive than the Game Boy, launching at $150 to the $90 Game Boy, and just couldn't compete on an even playing fielc Again, this was a case of expensive technology that was impractical – and unsuccessful.

1989 Lynx



1989 Quickshot Supervision



1991 Game Gear



1995 Virtual Boy



A cheap and tacky derivative of Nintendo's hugely successful Game Boy, the Supervision was frankly awful. A dearth of quality software was the main problem with Quickshot's offering, but lack of finesse, coupled with a glaring absence of any redeemable features, saw the somewhat ironically named Supervision quickly killed off.

Perhaps Nintendo's most impractical hardware release, the Virtual Boy was fundamentally flawed from the outset. More in the vein of MB's tabletop Vectrex than NCL's very own Game Boy, the Virtual Boy utilised a headache-inducing display method and was uncomfortable to use – its games suffered as a result. A blot on Nintendo's record book, and quickly discontinued in an attempt to pretend it never existed.





jargon: "You need a technology like GPRS to make *Counter Strike* work."

You also need decent network gaming infrastructures – and they're coming, too. Swedish tech company Terraplay Systems has developed a 'state of the art' telecommunications platform for online mobile gaming which takes all the hassle out of getting online multiplayer games up and running as far as developers are concerned, and supports all the forthcoming mobile gaming technologies. "Terraplay is fully scalable," points out the company's Chief Technical Officer **Magnus Jändel**. "Games with thousands of players are supported, and both simple turn-based games and complex realtime action games benefit from our technology. Terraplay was designed for the most demanding realtime game genres, and delivers full telecom quality."

Realtime multiplayer gaming on a mobile may sound like the stuff of fantasy – especially when you look at your current device with its little monochrome screen, barely capable of displaying those must-have downloadable icons. But GPRS is certainly not the only technology with the potential to revolutionise handheld gaming via mobile handsets. All the major phone manufacturers are developing handsets with colour screens and a decent amount of onboard memory. "Most of the GPRS devices we've seen in development offer a featureset similar to current PDAs and thus have at least 8Mb RAM," says Durlacher's **Nick Gibson.**

Finally, it seems, you'll be able to download complete games to your phone. Nokia, Motorola et al are also fitting their latest models with J2ME compatibility – J2ME being a mobile version of Java which provides developers with a powerful platform-independent programming language.

Gibson reckons J2ME will dominate the mobile sector for at least two years and will prove an important step in providing the next level of mobile gaming playability. Manchester-based developer iFone, for example, has used Java to create mobile versions of *Asteroids, Breakout* and *Pong* – some of which will be embedded in forthcoming handsets, and others downloadable from the Web. No doubt this'll start a mobile retro tidal wave. Imagine the thrill of playing *Galaxians* on the train or in the playground. Or battling *Defender* mutants while waiting for the bus. It's *Astro Wars* all over again.

Much later, possibly not until 2003, Europe will finally see the first 3G-compatible handsets and PDAs. This new phase in the wireless network revolution is something

Manchester-based developer iFone, for example, has used Java to create mobile versions of Asteroids, Breakout and Pong – some of which will be embedded in forthcoming handsets







1995 Sega Nomad



A portable Genesis is hardly something to be sneered at. The Nomad, exactly that, could even be hooked up to a TV, and you could plug a Genesis pad into the system for added authenticity. As a handheld, however, it was too big and too clumsy to threaten Game Boy's domination.

1997 Game.com



Tiger Electronics' Game.com was too early to catch the Internet take-off – and too inadequate to make any use of it anyway. Its limited text-only browsing was disappointingly primitive. Not surprisingly, it flopped, although it did play host to severely cut-down ports of *Duke Nukem 3D, Fighters Megamix, Resident Evil 2* and *Sonic Jam*, no less.

1998 Neo Geo Pocket



SNK's diminutive Neo Geo was armed with a powerful 16bit CPU. For those discerning enough to pick up a Neo Geo Pocket, the system's qualities – its on-board battery backup, its wealth of excellent games, its light and stylish design – outweighed the mono display. Even the LCD screen, despite its monochrome nature, was sharp and bright. The Neo Geo Pocket's limited PDA features, incorporating a calendar, world clock and horoscope, added an interesting slant to the hardware's design. Games came from SNK and its cohorts, early black and white gems including *King of Fighters R-1* and *Neo Geo Cup '98*. The Neo Geo Pocket was only a stopgap product, however.

The Neo Geo Pocket Color was notably more powerful than Nintendo's Game Boy Color and not too far removed from the Game Boy Advance; it was all that SNK's first portable had aspired to be. At its core were a 16bit Toshiba CPU running at a mite over 6MHz and a Z80 at little over 3MHz. In spite of a new full colour TFT LCD (notably brighter than any of Nintendo's colour displays), battery life increased from 20 hours off two AAA cells with the Neo Geo Pocket to some 40 hours off two AA batteries. Also notable was the system's control pad, an adaptation of the Neo Geo CD controller's microswitched thumbpad.

Now a firm cult favourite, the Neo Geo Pocket Color plays host to some outstanding games, *Faselei* being the most highly prized. Other more common titles available for the Neo Geo Pocket Color include *Metal Slug 2nd Mission, Puzzle Bobble Mini* and *Sonic the Hedgehog: Pocket Adventure.*

1998 WonderSwan



After founding Koto, Gunpei Yokoi started work on what would become the Bandai-produced WonderSwan. The WonderSwan was the Game Boy creator's first project outside of NCL's walls, and one that caught Japanese gamers' imaginations like few other handheld consoles have. The system's display was relatively high in resolution, displaying 224 x 144 pixels in a space measuring less than 2.5 inches from corner to corner. What's more, it only required one AA battery and yet would run for up to 40 hours on a single charge. A 16bit CPU running at 3MHz orchestrated all this. Better yet, the console weighed a little over 100g, and taking its cue from the Lynx's flipping idea, could also be played with the screen positioned vertically or horizontally. An object of desire for Japanese youth, the unit was also ably supported by big thirdparty developers.









everyone in the business is looking forward to – especially network providers who've spent billions securing 3G licences and are now experiencing 'financial difficulties'. It should also be an epoch-making event for gamers.

"3G will bring the ability to serve up rich content to users at extremely high speeds (i.e. broadband)," says Carey at iFone. "Existing content will be served up faster than before: you can have always-on Internet connection and it will enable multitasking. However, the big changes will be in realtime gaming, because 3G should facilitate proper realtime multiplayer gaming without any time lags – and, more importantly, persistent world multiplayer gaming, encouraging the wireless community that everyone currently talks about."

The PC failed to take online gaming and make it truly massmarket. Mobile phones could be the format to finally deliver. Yet a note of caution should be sounded: Nokia has recently stated that it doesn't expect 3G to fully take off until 2004 at the earliest – and the mobile sector has also been paved with disasters. It's likely to take a killer app with the underlying sophistication of *Pokémon* to truly bring the mobile community together. And without visionary game designers, the proliferation of memory-test titles and choose-your-fate adventure games will not end in a hurry.

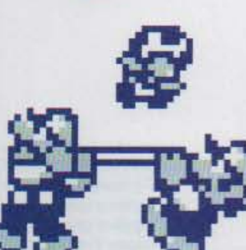
Future ambition

It has been suggested that a miniature version of the console versus PC war, with GBA as console (dedicated, user-friendly gaming hardware) and mobile as PC (multi-use, online capable hardware that also just happens to offer games) is on the horizon. But don't expect Nintendo to give up its handheld monopoly without a fight. The company's Mobile System GB gadget enables Game Boy Color owners to hook their console up to the mobile system network to play simple Versus games and download game data. Now Nintendo is rumoured to be working on either a Game Boy Advance/mobile phone combo unit, or a Mobile System-style device that'll enable users to connect their GBA to their current mobile. And in the background, Sony – the godfather of entertainment portability – is rumoured to be hard at work on some kind of handheld platform. It seems the videogame industry has a new battleground…

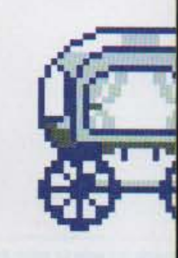










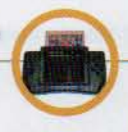
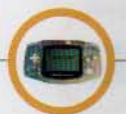


Co-operative mode

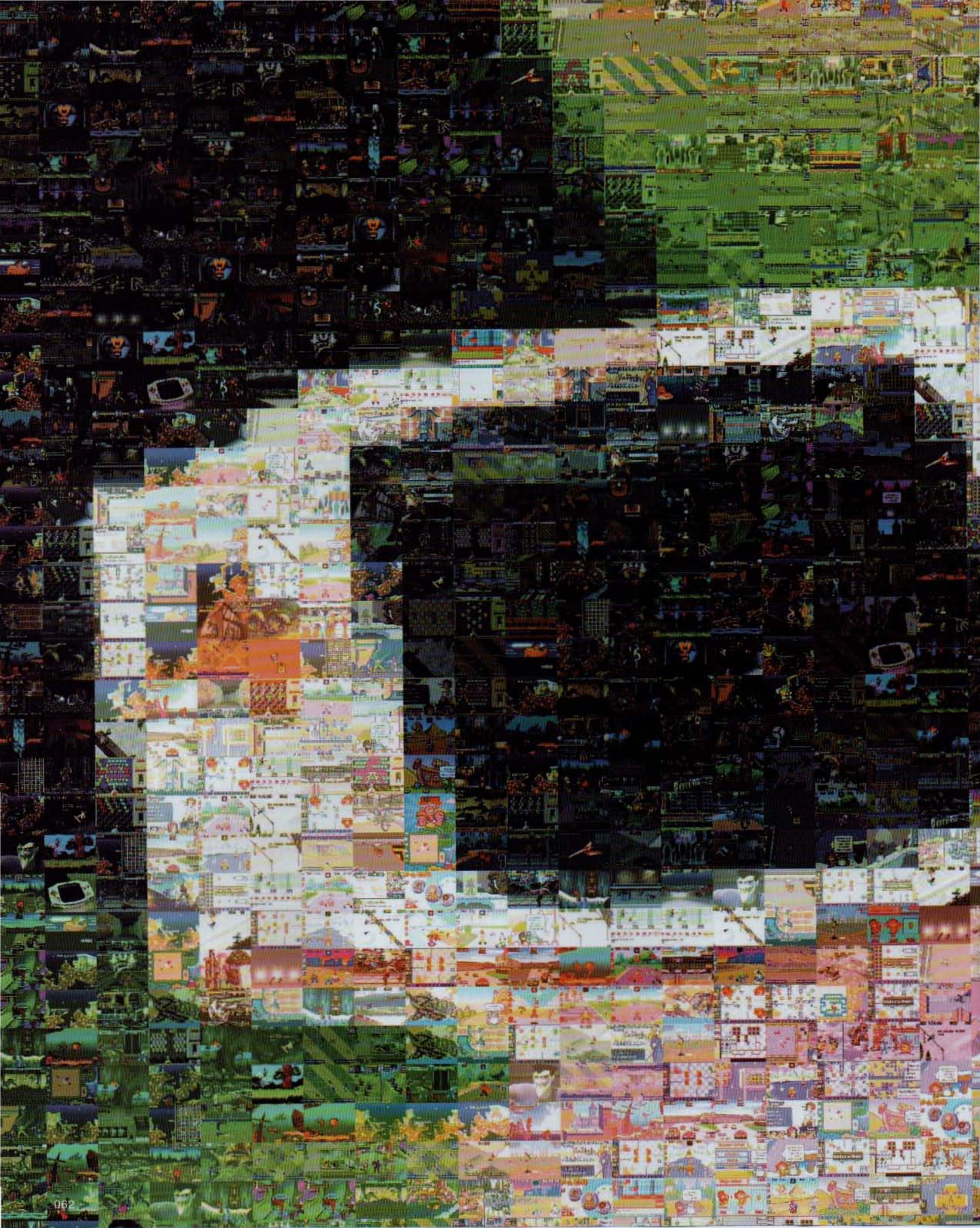
In order to push mobile handsets as viable gaming platforms, **Edge** believes those involved in the industry are going to have to get together and create some kind of global standard. DoCoMo's iMode and forthcoming FOMA 3G handsets are impressively advanced – but right now they're only available in Japan via DoCoMo's own network. Meanwhile in the West, mobile phone manufacturers, developers and network operators are in danger of terminally confusing prospective gamers with technical terms like GPRS, EDGE and, most prevalently, 3G. There is no clear consensus on how to get games to mobile owners, how to market them and how to charge for them (pay-per-play, pay-per-download, etc.) – which is why so many of the traditional videogame big boys – EA, Infogrames, Eidos – are merely dipping their toes into the mobile gaming pool. However, Motorola, Nokia, Ericsson and Siemens have recently all combined to set up the Mobile Games Interoperability Forum – an initiative dedicated to creating a standard cross-platform, cross-network online gaming infrastructure. In such a rabidly competitive market, it is somewhat ironic that co-operation may show us the only way forward.

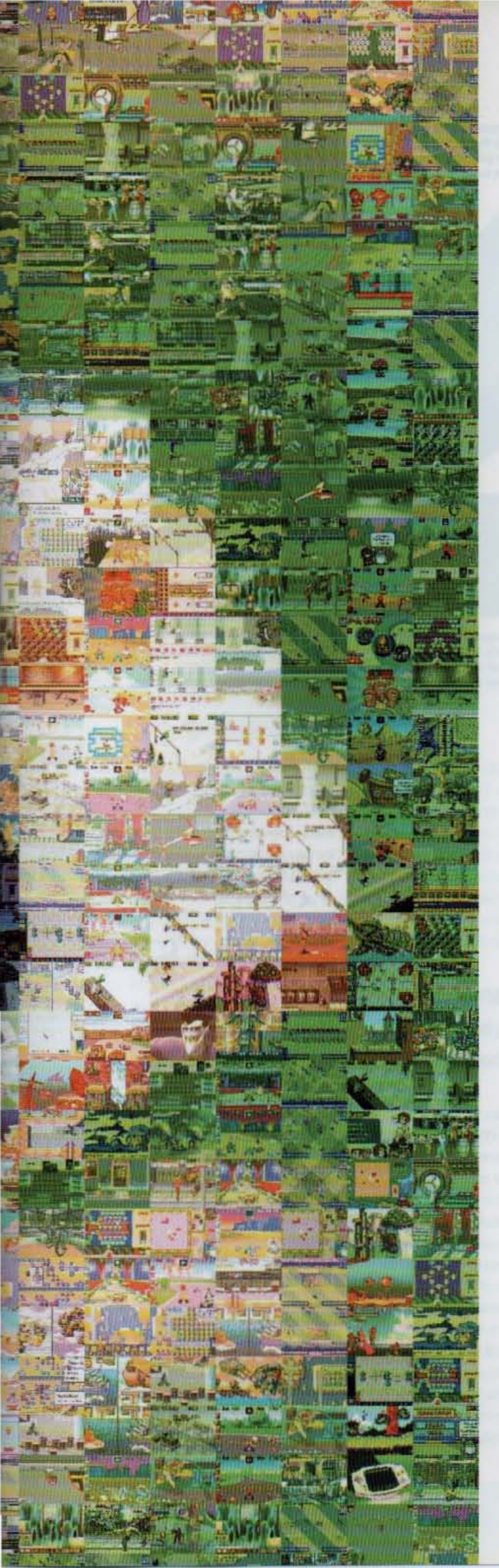
Heralding from deepest Kowloon, this unofficial (pirate) portable Famicom was built like a Game Gear: horizontally-orientated, colour screen… Unconvincing. The Game Axe's selling point was that it would accept any Famicom cartridge, and via an adaptor would also run any NES cart. An oddity, certainly, but a novel one at that.

The name is made up, of course, but this Nokia concept design hints at the future of handset technology. Although touch-screen interfaces are imminent, the lack of a suitably haptic joystick is a worry.

1999 Game Axe  2001 GBA  2003 Nokia 3G  2004 Palm Pirate 

Destined to become the most popular handheld system of all times – even when up against its father, the Game Boy. Developer support is already tremendous, although the lack of a backlight means owners cannot always play their games on impulse. (See page 62 for a full assessment.)





A Boy's Tale

With over 130 million units sold, the Game Boy won the hearts of a generation of gameplayers worldwide. But can its new successor, the Game Boy Advance, possibly reach such dizzy heights?

The Game Boy Advance was released in Japan on March 21. Partly fuelled by the success of *Yugioh Duel Monsters 5* and *Super Mario Advance*, the system sold 650,000 units on its opening day. Cake Media predicts that since its launch, one Game Boy Advance system has been sold every five seconds worldwide. Although the stock situation has been alleviated in the East, stores in America are still struggling to meet the demand for the tiny handheld device. Already the Game Boy Advance looks on track to be even more successful than its father, the Game Boy.

But is this the whole story? Heavy criticism of the reflective screen, high software prices (especially in Europe) and tight profit margins have given all sections of the gaming community pause for thought. **Edge** reflects on the early days of the GBA and speaks to the people responsible for the future of Nintendo's 'killer' handheld system.

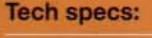
Although significant rumours of a new Nintendo handheld system emerged on the Net some four years ago, the real GBA story began back in 1993. A growing microprocessor design company called ARM travelled across to Nintendo's HQ in Kyoto to pitch several ideas for electronic devices. **Mike Muller**, ARM's chief technical officer, takes up the story: "Our first meeting with Nintendo was back in 1993. I went to Japan nearly every other week and we proposed lots of different things to Sharp and Nintendo. Accelerators to plug-ins to new portable games machines. Lots of different ideas. We actually built some significant prototypes back in 1995."

Although Nintendo was impressed by the scope of ARM's ambition, the all-powerful Game Boy and the upcoming Game Boy Color were enough to delay production of a successor. "For various reasons to do with the timing of the market and what stage their products were at, things quietened down," continues Muller. "We thought around 1997 that we've tried hard, but we've failed and we haven't been able to



Golf has always taken well to the handheld format. Konami's *ESPN Final Round Golf* should win early accolades with its beautiful representation of the sport. Expect many more birdie opportunities to follow

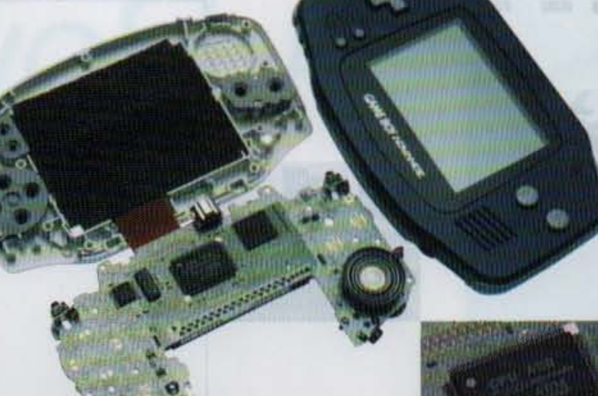
The ARM designed CPU that powers the versatile Game Boy Advance. Although the architecture is capable of some tremendous graphical trickery, ARM predicts that the system could be superceded

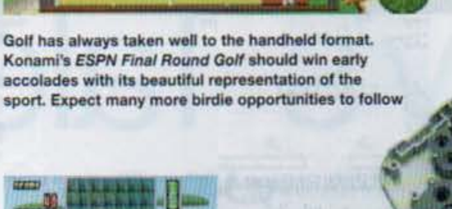


Tech specs:

CPU:
ARM 32bit with embedded memory
Main RAM:
32Kb WRAM (CPU), 256Kb WRAM (external of CPU)
Graphics RAM:
96Kb VRAM
Performance:
511 colours simultaneously in character mode; 32,768 in bitmap mode
Graphics function:
Transparency, scaling and rotating effects
Audio performance:
Stereo and Dolby Surround supported through headphone terminal
Storage and media:
Cartridge format, maximum 256Mbits, compatible with Game Boy and Game Boy Color Game Paks
Input/Output:
Headphone terminal, Game link port







Anti-clockwise: *Columns Advance, Super Dodge Ball Advance, Steven Gerrard's Total Football 2002, Crash Bandicoot: The Wrath of Cortex* and *Diddy Kong Pilot* prove the GBA is for all ages

persuade Nintendo to move to the ARM architecture. What we didn't know is that around that time they were starting to think seriously about the Game Boy Advance – and then all the elements picked up again.

"We thought, 'We've been doing this for four years and haven't got anywhere – it's not going to happen.' But those ideas were planted in '93. And in fact the ideas were different to what we were proposing through 1995-97. But you can see where that started from. Time had moved on and you could do better things with LCDs, and the cost base had changed. It just goes to show it can take a long time to do business in Japan. You have to keep plugging away at it."

No-one denies that the GBA is a beautiful and intricately designed piece of architecture, but it does have one obvious flaw. The decision to keep costs low and battery life lengthy has resulted in an LCD screen *without* a backlight. This Sharp-manufactured screen has come under vehement criticism for only allowing optimum visibility in sunlight or under fluorescent lighting. *Castlevania*, in particular, with its dark palette is impractical to play under any other conditions. The announcement that Matsushita was to take over production of the screen raised hopes that such visibility problems would soon be resolved, but at this year's Space World, **Shigeru Miyamoto** dashed such claims: "No, I do not think Nintendo will change the screen. I realise there have been some problems here. But we are encouraging brighter images because programmers always see it brighter."

No-one denies that the GBA is a beautiful and intricately designed piece of architecture, but it does have one obvious flaw… an LCD without a backlight



Banjo Kazooie 2: Grunty's Revenge (above) and *Donkey Kong Coconut Crackers* (right) are just two of the titles coming out of Rare. Predictably, the company is supporting the GBA wholesale with vibrant titles

For developers, too, the screen display has been something of a bugbear. Although similar problems were apparent on the Game Boy and Game Boy Color, the limited nature of those formats enabled developers the freedom to create bold 'chunky' looking games with a limited range of colours. But now gamers expect a lot more. "That is the only flaw in the hardware as far as I can tell," admits **Ian Baverstock**, CEO of Kuju Entertainment. "There are people that are claiming you can do more with the contrast. Certainly we are putting a lot of effort into the artwork and the brightness and the gamma controls to get the optimum out of it from that point of view. Ultimately, I think it is a feature of the machine that the screen is reflective and you just can't see in some lights."

Miyamoto-san's claim that there are software solutions to the poor display seems to be a little optimistic. Apart from tweaking the brightness of the colours, the situation will not improve

Sonic Advance (left) and *Chu Chu Rocket* (right): two Sega classics to bolster Nintendo's inclusive platform



markedly, and if anything merely limit developers' graphical options.

"When developing on a PC screen, the graphics will look a lot more vibrant than when placed on the GBA LCD," explains **David Williams**, development director at Pocket Studios. "We use a development system that enables us to change the brightness of images while viewing them on the GBA screen (realtime), so we know the graphics we create on PC are just right for the GBA when placed in-game." Although Nintendo does not plan to improve its screen display any time soon, such tools should ensure that *Castlevania*-style murkiness will occur less frequently.

Another cause for concern is the abundance of 16bit and 8bit titles currently being resurrected for the format. While *Super Mario Kart* was upgraded significantly in terms of handling and course design, there is a serious danger that publishers may follow suit with uninspired retro 'gems'. *Paradroid* and *Manic Miner* have already been mooted by Jester Interactive as viable titles for the format, and while many gamers look forward to the likes of *Mario Advance 2* (*Super Mario World*) and *Defender* with a nostalgic tear in the eye, the addition of the word 'Advance' to any ageing game could become a worrying trend.

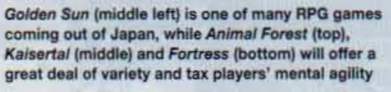
But the GBA architecture is already being pushed in interesting directions. A glut of firstperson perspective titles, sniper modes, 3D scaling and impressive polygon-pushing in games such as *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* augur well for the future. "I think a lot of people were shocked when they saw our early demos for an FPS engine," reveals **Cameron Sheppard** of Crawfish Interactive. "Until that time I don't really think many people believed that the GBA could really cope. Now they know it can – and this is just the beginning, as programmers know more

"I don't think many believed that the GBA could really cope. Now they know it can – and this is just the beginning… There should be some brilliant new stuff coming out"

GameCube adaptor cable

Shigeru Miyamoto demonstrated the GBA's ability to connect with the GameCube for the first time at this year's Space World. Though *Flippin' Kirby* certainly contains innovative elements – such as the ability to disappear into holes and reappear on the GBA screen – it is unlikely to get most gamers salivating. Secret betting (for horse racing games), player roster lists and radar scopes are just some of the ideas proposed for the connectivity. But the limited nature of the D-pad digital input on GBA may deter many developers from experimentation.





Golden Sun **(middle left) is one of many RPG games coming out of Japan, while *Animal Forest* (top), *Kaisertal* (middle) and *Fortress* (bottom) will offer a great deal of variety and tax players' mental agility**

3D shooters

While *Doom* is likely to be the commercial victor in the first FPS war between *Backtrack*, *Ecks Vs Sever*, *Doom* and *Dark Arena*, expect many, many more over the coming years. All these titles offer fourplayer link-up modes though some developers have experienced teething synchronicity problems along the way. Furthermore, the extra costs induced by providing fourplayer modes, battery back-up and extra memory has been off-putting to some publishers. As a result, many first generation games have been curbed because of tight profit margins.



Clockwise: *BackTrack*, *Ecks Vs Sever*, *Dark Arena* and *Doom* are all vying for early FPS supremacy

Along with *Mat Hoffman Pro BMX*, expect a glut of 'Xtreme' sports titles to be released in the new year





Card-e-reader

Details of price and a release date is still sketchy but Nintendo's Card-e-reader is sure to be big in Japan. Each card holds up to 3,360 bytes of information contained in a narrow strip along the side. Although the new range of *Pokémon* compatible cards were on show at this year's Space World, Nintendo plan to cash in with other popular franchises.

Peripheral vision

Among the numerous peripherals plugging into the GBA's every orifice is Kemco's GBA TV adaptor. Details are sketchy at the moment, but if price and quality are reasonable this will be hugely popular. It will also make dodging the TV licence investigators a touch easier for students.





Something old and something new: *Worms World Party* and *Pinball of the Dead*. Both are welcome in Edge's eyes





Tony Hawk's Pro Skater (top) is currently the best 'street' game on the GBA. *Razor Freestyle Scooter* may not win over older gamers but visually it has a slight edge

Mobile phone adaptor

A mobile phone adaptor has been mooted since the GBA was first announced. In theory, this could usher in an exciting new age of online gaming on the move. But much still depends on the amount of effort Nintendo and other thirdparties put into developing games which take advantage of the form rather than just delivering trivial online extras. It seems likely that the device will take off in Japan, with Europe, as ever, following months if not years later.

and more about the hardware there should be some brilliant new-looking stuff coming out."

Certainly the GBA architecture – which can emulate the SNES's Mode 7, produce transparency effects and deliver speedy sprite scaling – has been likened to Nintendo's ageing 16bit system. But is it capable of more?

"Initial code is impressive in a SNES-style way," points out Rage's Communications Director **Glen O'Connell**: "But there is no reason why this cannot be pushed further still. *Tony Hawk's* proves that PlayStation-type games are achievable." Williams agrees: "I think when the GBA was first announced, everyone ran around shouting 'It's a handheld SNES!' But while the games look and feel similar, the actual hardware is very different. A SNES programmer would still have to learn the hardware from scratch, although 'old-skool' techniques and tricks will still be a valuable asset."

The ARM-designed microprocessor is just one element of the technology which grants more versatility in terms of coding. "It enables you to do more in software and you actually need less of the dedicated hardware sprite engines," adds Muller. "While those sprite engines are good, the problem is that the gameplay changes. You go from a shoot 'em up to some 3D simulation, and the sprite engine that was designed for one style of game isn't actually the best thing for a new style of game. So, by doing things more in software, you can just use the power to build platform games or 3D games or whatever the next big thing is that people want. You are not so tied to some hardware architecture that goes out of date. I'm talking not just about changing graphics; it's doing sound and other interesting things."

Certainly the developers **Edge** spoke to talked in glowing terms of the capabilities of the GBA architecture. But the GBA is not just superior to its predecessor in terms of memory capacity. The Game Boy Color was split into 16K memory banks, making optimisation of the space available a demanding task. The GBA architecture is more open and therefore more friendly to get to grips with. The ability to program for the most part in C, as opposed to assembler, has also been met with widespread enthusiasm from the development community.

But while developers are revelling in the ability to provide richer gaming experiences on a handheld device, publishers are less gung-ho. The expense of cartridge manufacture, Nintendo's firm thirdparty policies and the sheer

"By doings things more in software, you can just use the power to build platform games or 3D games or whatever the next big thing is that people want"



Two special games coming out of Crawfish: *Speedball 2* and *Streetfighter Alpha 3*. Let's hope the multiplayer aspects are as good as they were on the originals

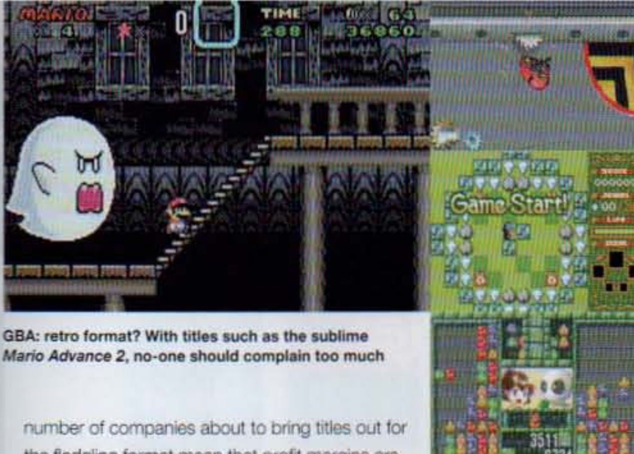


Light source

Edge was hoping to provide a comprehensive list of all the light peripherals available for the system with a short review on each. But this was foiled by the unimaginable ineptitude of many tested. Only Logic 3's Robopower charging unit, complete with light and magnifier, provided some workable degree of illumination. The add-on isn't cheap, however, coming in at £20.



Shaun Palmer's Pro Snowboarder (left) may not delive the depth and thrills of *1080°*, but it's sure to captur imaginations for short bus journeys. *Klonoa – Empir of Dreams* (right) was showcased at Space World an blended intricate puzzles with sublime platformin



GBA: retro format? With titles such as the sublime *Mario Advance 2*, no-one should complain too much

number of companies about to bring titles out for the fledgling format mean that profit margins are likely to be tight for some time. "Nintendo has always been up-front about that all along," admits O'Connell. "But it does put pressure on thirdparty publishers. Profit margins are tight as GBA products come out at £35 – which is not too dissimilar to PS2 prices. This means we have to look at the number of titles in our portfolio. Be a little more careful about the stock we order."

This has many practical implications, as O'Connell explains: "You have to place your products a little ahead of time," he says. "We have games coming out in October/November, and we had to submit those in August. If you're doing it on PlayStation2, you could submit in September. One of the downsides is that if you suddenly have a massive hit on your hands, the actual turnaround for getting core stock is longer than disc-based systems." Baverstock is more blunt: "I worry that a lot of people have rushed into it. There may be a lot of fallout 12 months into the whole process. The platform won't suffer, but some publishers may find that they are losing money on GBA which might result in developers having contracts cancelled."

The GBA is selling fast. Some 50m Euros have been set aside for marketing in this year alone, and Nintendo expects to shift 3m units before 2002. But there have been grumblings from many sections of the industry about the pricing of GBA hardware and software.

"Nintendo set a trade price from which

Robot Wars (top) and *Boulderdash* (centre) should provide addictive fun for all ages. The magnificent *Puyo Puyo* – which for some gamers is superior to *Tetris* – will also be making it over to GBA very soon

these added costs. But when WHSmith decided to bring down the price of *Mario Kart: Super Circuit* to £30, it was telling that other retailers followed suit pretty rapidly. Nintendo, incidentally, refused to comment on the pricing and manufacturing of cartridges.

It would be foolish to predict anything other than a wholesale success for the GBA. Although the £90 price tag (with software at £35) sets it outside pocket money for younger consumers, it's clear that Nintendo is targeting the system to a wider demographic. The format's slinky styling and retro chic have enabled the Kyoto company to target 20-somethings with its Gaming 24:7 ads. Of course, the irony is that the GBA is already old technology. Rumours that Sony is currently looking to bring out its own portable gaming system may not be too far from the truth. Research and development, coupled with the time spent manufacturing the GBA, has inevitably seen technology advancing to another level.

"We have moved on microprocessor technology a lot since then," concludes Muller.

"There's no doubt that we now have much more powerful processors that could be built into a similar product. Sony are a licensee of our technology"

certain discounts are given – depending on achieving certain criteria – and this then gives each retailer their cost price," defends **Bart Saunt**, Senior Product Manager, Games and Multimedia, at Virgin Megastores. "From the cost price we work out the selling price which is determined by what margin we need to make on both hardware and software. Nintendo would not give us a recommended retail price." While publishers complain about the expense of cartridge manufacture, retailers take the position that they are the last in line, taking the brunt of all

"As for Sony? I can't comment on that. There's no doubt that we now have much more powerful processors that could be built into a similar product. Sony are a licensee of our technology. They use it in mobile phones. If they decided they wanted to build a handheld gaming platform, they could do that. Nothing is stopping someone else bringing out a new machine." But until that happens, gamers can be assured of many years of enjoyment with their humble GBA, albeit under extreme lighting conditions.



Most wanted

Is it a valid criticism to bemoan the number of retro titles appearing on Nintendo's new handheld? While updates of Nintendo classics are welcome, the return of Monty Mole is less so. **Edge** picks ten of the best in need of portability.

Rampart (Atari)
Atari's 1990 coin-op would provide a wonderful fourplayer link-up opportunity to castle-assaulting fans. This blend of strategy and destruction surely requires an update.

Gunstar Heroes (Mega Drive)
Furious action and cute stylings are typical Treasure trademarks. The company doesn't like resurrecting old titles, but anything from Treasure would be a blessing for the GBA.

Tempest 2000 (Jaguar)
Clearly, its not going to be quite so hypnotic as the new Nuon version. But will Minter ever develop a title which can be appreciated by more than one man and his sheep?

Card Fighters Clash 2 (Neo Geo Pocket)
Since there's no chance of an English language sequel ever appearing on the NGPC, it's only fair that it's dealt on to Nintendo's handheld. Crawfish, Capcom, anybody... Please?

Pilot Wings (SNES)
Mode 7 went into overdrive on this fondly remembered SNES title. Floating through bitmapped clouds has never been done so well and could already be in development.

The Great Escape (Spectrum)
Truly broke the mould when it was released back in 1983. Disguises, wire cutters, parade ground line-ups, guard dogs - all the cliches were present and correct. Would be enjoyed by every Tom, Dick and Harry.

Elite (BBC Micro)
Braben and Bell's classic wireframe trading extravaganza could easily cross-over to GBA. The thought of enhanced online options, complete with Generation ships, is a thought worth savouring.

Dungeon Master (Atari ST)
If a feasible cursor menu system is introduced then *Dungeon Master* could enthral a new generation. Tiggy, Wuuf, Halk and Daroou will once again emerge from their captivity to save the day.

Secret of Mana (SNES)
Expect a legion of retro RPG titles to appear on the system. A Square game, however, still seems unlikely after the rift which emerged when the company dumped Nintendo in favour of Sony.

Gauntlet (Arcade)
Of late, this title has been massacred by Midway with a pathetic 3D makeover. Returned to 2D this will provide tremendous fourplayer link-up action. Just don't shoot the food...

Edge's review policy

Every issue, **Edge** evaluates the best, most interesting, hyped, innovative or promising games on a scale of ten, where five naturally represents the middle value. **Edge**'s rating system is fair, progressive and balanced. An average game deserves an average mark – not, as many believe, seven out of ten. Broadly speaking, scores correspond to the following sentiments: one: disastrous, two: appalling, three: severely flawed, four: disappointing, five: average, six: competent, seven: distinguished, eight: excellent, nine: astounding, ten: revolutionary.

Videogames on the **Edge**

This month's unanimous choices...

Blast Corps

It's old and a little crusty around the edges but Rare's early N64 title is still one of the top 20 games on the format. Just a pity it's over so quickly.



(N64) Rare

Mario Kart Super Circuit

The lure of extravagant shortcuts and multiplayer link-up is sufficient to keep **Edge**'s correspondent on the loo all day. It's the only place he can see the screen.



(Game Boy Advance) Nintendo

Oracle of Seasons

Sword, check; shield, check; boomerang, check; shovel, check. Two dungeons in and it's all familiar, but it's a structure **Edge** doesn't mind revisiting.



(Game Boy Color) Nintendo

Oracle of Ages

Dr Who? Link has probably travelled through time more than the Gallifreyan do-gooder. Developed by Capcom, it's still up to the standards of earlier Zeldas.



(Game Boy Color) Nintendo

Fatal seduction

Graphics 'to die for'? Perhaps not...

Being a graphics whore isn't easy. Especially this month, and particularly on the day *Ico* arrived in the **Edge** office, because it's hard to put an objective value on something when you're surrounded by people falling over themselves to tell you how beautiful it is. The subtle nuances in *Ico* do amaze – the rays of light falling gently through the stonework, or the way the girl flicks her hair – and everyone wants to watch. But there's a nagging doubt in the back of **Edge**'s mind. It's just levers and switches, the same as it was 15 years ago.

But then it'd be churlish to criticise *Burnout*, a game whose stunning visuals do much to enhance the sensation of presence and speed, for just being a driving game; all you really need are Left, Right, and Go Faster. Likewise, *Cosmic Smash*'s attempt to reinvent *Arkanoid* relies heavily on atmospherics to provide the driving force for replay. It's the *Shenmue* question all over again: if your eyes fall in love, should your heart automatically follow? Next month, **Edge** is scheduled to have its retinas tested further with the Dreamcast release of *Shenmue II*, at the time of writing still down for a European release. It may yet go entirely to Xbox, providing slaves to visuals with another reason to buy Bill's box beyond *Halo*'s stunning detail and the slick curves of *DOA3*.

A great deal of the driving force behind gaming's eternal hardware upgrade path is based on wanting to look at prettier, shinier things. Why? The showoff value, perhaps, or maybe it'd be more tactful to blame it on the desire for immersion. The drooling exclamations behind *Rogue Leader* have never had anything to do with how the game plays, just hopes that this'll take the salivating fanboys another step closer to being 'in' the 'Star Wars' universe. How could admiring the Hoth snowscape from a racing snowspeeder not excite someone who's dreamed about it since 1983? **Edge** is guilty, too. Sometimes you just have to let your jaw drop.

But not too far, and not for just anything. Historically speaking, *that* line – you know, **E**3, the *Rise of the Robots* Cover, "Graphics to die for" – will scar **Edge** forever. But scars have a purpose; they remind us of our mistakes. Beauty's only skin deep, and while non-generic atmospherics are playing more and more of a role in videogames, thrilling imagery has to be backed up by something more compelling. *Ico* and *Shenmue* manage to do just enough, and since the future promises more of their ilk, those who buy into aesthetic gratification have much to look forward to.



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072

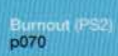


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Burnout

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Acclaim** Developer: **Criterion Games** Price: **£40** Release: **November 23**

Bad news first, then: because of timing difficulties between linked PS2s, the proposed iLink support (see **E**101) hasn't made submission code. And neither has the Far East track (although this was down to lack of development time).

The good news is that, in practice, this matters little. Granted, given its gameplay potential the loss of iLink capability is genuinely disheartening, but the fact remains that *Burnout* suffers little as a result. What remains should have you so enthralled, you're more than likely to focus on what's made it in than what's been left out.

It's a valiant, much-needed adrenaline-filled syringe passionately thrust into the exhausted heart of the videogame racing community









While not vast, the vehicle selection is sufficiently varied. The game offers both a 60Hz option and anamorphic display. The twoplayer option is excellent fun (above)

Look at the game's characteristics on paper and you'd be forgiven for thinking most of the DVD's blank surface has never felt the comforting warmth of a laser: a quintet of tracks (which are manipulated to form a more respectable 16 and distributed among six championships), nine vehicles (once fully unlocked), just three other opponents per race, plus civilian traffic.

You'd be forgiven. But you'd be wrong: *Burnout* is far more than the sum of its parts.

The tracks, split into Euro and US styles, are successfully designed, with a satisfying mix of bends and straights. They're long, too, with the PS2 continuously working to stream the necessary data in order to smoothly display the game's impressive, busy environments. And although there are only five true distinct routes, in reverse – and usually accompanied by a lighting change – most feel remarkably unfamiliar. Certainly different enough to (almost) come across as new. It's worth noting that all of the racing is lap based; the A-to-B suggestion for the marathon rounds has been abandoned.

The handling matches the game's arcade atmosphere perfectly, with a responsive and intuitive model that discourages you from ever venturing below triple figures, while balancing powerslides soon becomes second nature. This accessibility is welcome, particularly when you consider the three AI competitors the game pits you against. With a relentless thirst for finishing first, they frequently swap positions with utter disregard for civilian traffic, driving recklessly against oncoming road users whose only defence is to swerve out of the way once flashing headlights and horn-sounding fail to deter the vehicle(s) coming towards them at unrealistic – although immensely entertaining – speeds. If you want to win (and you'll have to in order to progress from one championship to the next), you're going to have to join them.



For the most part, crashes are convincingly portrayed with a real sense of weight and inertia. Replays are good, too, and your favourite collisions can be saved and replayed at varying speeds and directions

Whatever you do, try not to blink. Blink and you'll almost certainly hit something. Collisions are part of the fun, although not necessarily the end of it; the game is generously balanced so that even occasional crashing shouldn't prevent you from the chance of still winning the race. Your AI opponents are brave and the game provides a decent challenge, but they're not infallible – accidents do happen. Or, of course, they can be made to happen (though this tends to be infinitely more rewarding when done during the superb twoplayer splitscreen mode).

If there is a weakness, other than some nit-picking, it's that even with the extra play modes, *Burnout* isn't the longest game in the world. But without a doubt it is one of the most addictive of recent times. More importantly, it's relentlessly enjoyable, even capable of seducing individuals with an aversion for motor vehicles. It's not particularly complex, but it does benefit from a certain purity usually associated with games of yesteryear.

Ultimately, it's pure exhilaration. The feeling of completing a collisionless lap, index finger firmly on the boost button, having powerslid your way around every corner and undergone enough near misses to scare a Heathrow air traffic controller, ranks alongside the best moments this pastime has to offer. And if nothing else, it's a valiant, much-needed adrenaline-filled syringe passionately thrust into the exhausted heart of the videogame racing community.

Edge rating: **Eight** out of ten

Previously in E86/E101











Although some of the traffic is random, Burnout is a game you genuinely learn and get better at the more you play. It's also the kind of game that entertains spectators almost as much as the player. Almost...





Sense of speed is excellent – and absurd when using the boost (obtained by driving dangerously, thus increasing heart rate, displayed as a bar on screen). Analogue sensitivity in the buttons is also well judged

Modus operandi

Other than Championship, Single Race, and Time Attack, playing through the game opens up more modes. Survival tests your ability to race through the tracks without getting involved in a crash (or it's game over). Face Off (there are four variants) sets you against a sole competitor whose car you win should you come first. Perhaps most interesting is Free Run, which removes the traffic from the road and enables you (and a friend, if you wish) to go up against the AI cars in a far safer environment – not the essence of the game, granted, but certainly a worthy inclusion.



Headhunter

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Amuze** Price: **£30** Release: **16 November**

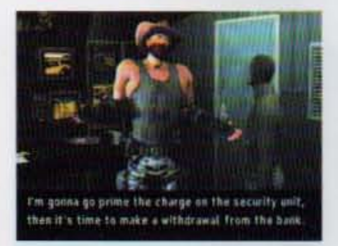
The future is a nice place to visit but you wouldn't want to live there. Brain-frying neuro stimulants, mind control chips, organ smuggling (that's organs of the internal rather than Hammond variety), the takeover of public services by shady corporations. The privatisation of war. This is the twisted dystopian universe of *Headhunter*, a hugely atmospheric thirdperson action adventure

Amnesiac tough guy Jack Wade is hunting down underworld crime lord Don Fulci, who is importing refugees to sell their internal organs









The varied gameplay takes in combat (top) and CGI plot-driving sequences (bottom) as well as shopping and photocopier death, naturally

that proves there's life in Dreamcast yet.

Comparisons with *Resident Evil* and *Metal Gear Solid* are as pointless as they are inevitable. Listing similarities – exploration, combat, CGI sequences, stealth, inventory screens, end-of-level boss encounters – is like criticising a new driving game because it features cars. *Headhunter* has plenty of its own personality, away from the Capcom and Konami archetypes.

As with all good cyberpunk tomes, you jack straight into the action. Amnesiac tough guy Jack Wade is hunting down underworld crime lord Don Fulci, who appears to be importing starving refugees into the country and selling them as spare parts to ageing rich folk desperate for replacement organs. But this is just the beginning of a plan that later involves Internet bank robbery, kidnapped fission scientists and nuclear Armageddon. You're fed this information throughout the game, so goals are always clearly defined. As with the similarly accomplished *Devil May Cry*, there's none of the aimless wandering about that characterises survival horror.

But it's the atmosphere, the sheer sci-fi detail that makes *Headhunter* stand out. Baddies attack you with cybernetic, acid-filled spiders; newsreaders wryly discuss nuclear doom; people brandish guns that jam the target's brain, incapacitating them without the use of bullets so valuable internal organs aren't damaged. At the centre of the whole thing is the Anti-Crime Network – a privatised police force that keeps a Criminal Exchange, a sort of 'Crimewatch' stock market that assigns points to felons: the more evil they do, the more their stock rises and the greater the price on their heads. Collecting the bounty are headhunters – part cop, part PI, part vigilante loners, hooked into a massive database of government and



police info. It's a stunningly immersive world.

Admittedly, the gameplay takes a while to develop. For the first few stages you feel as though you're being led about on a leash. In one room there's a locked cupboard, in the next there's a key. However, later locales (like the labyrinthine Wolfpack gang HQ) make you run around for ages with seemingly useless objects until finally everything starts clicking into place. Eventually you get puzzles that span whole buildings, yet you aren't forced to continually backtrack – the game always manages to conjure up a secret passage, fire escape or elevator to provide short-cuts. It's brilliant, user-friendly design.

Combat is, for the most part, similarly well handled. Key locations are crawling with gang members, each with sight lines and predefined patrol patterns. Running in on autofire rarely works. Instead you can hit them with a stealth attack (snapping necks from behind), or merely divert their attention with a decoy shell before running past unnoticed. The control pad provides a variety of stealth moves from edging along walls to crouching and rolling, although predictably this can get frustratingly fiddly. (Especially when you're stuck in a corner taking hits and you can't get Jack to face in the right direction, select the correct weapon, aim and fire at the key target quickly enough.)

Undeniably, though, stealth heightens the atmosphere tenfold. And there are some great set pieces – like when you first get into the mall (where Fulci's syndicate gang are orchestrating a huge bank robbery). You

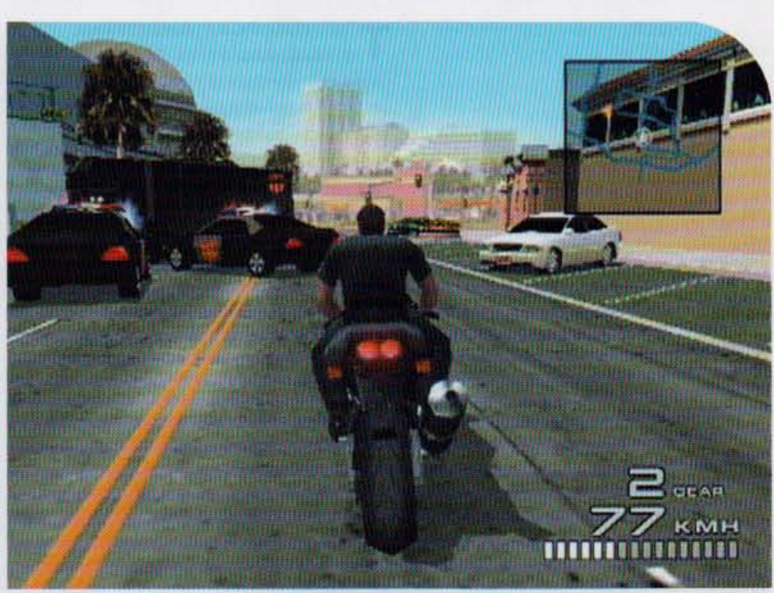
Advance Wars

Previously in E86/E103







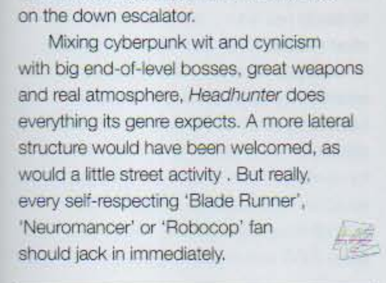


Caught up in the action it's easy to take the crisp, finely detailed visuals for granted. Graphically, *Headhunter* is easily comparable with current second-generation PS2 fare



must creep around the shops, sneaking behind guards and stunning them beside ornamental flowerbeds. The combination of familiar settings and secret agent-style assassination works brilliantly. Especially when shooting gangsters while travelling on the down escalator.

Mixing cyberpunk wit and cynicism with big end-of-level bosses, great weapons and real atmosphere, *Headhunter* does everything its genre expects. A more lateral structure would have been welcomed, as would a little street activity . But really, every self-respecting 'Blade Runner', 'Neuromancer' or 'Robocop' fan should jack in immediately.



Edge rating: Eight out of ten





To open up each new section and upgrade your headhunting licence, you must complete a range of virtual missions, testing your driving, stealth and shooting skills. Each licence provides new weapons and info



Easy Rider

As a hard-bitten bounty hunter, Jack Wade naturally uses a motorcycle to get between locations. These driving sections provide plenty of fun in themselves, but they're also exploited as part of the story. Before you can apply for each consecutive LEILA licence (there are four to get through, from C to AAA) – you have to pick up skill points by tearing around town, keeping to the top speed and not hitting any traffic. Driving sections also turn up in LEILA's virtual training sessions and there's a great 'Die Hard III'-style sequence where Wade must tear around town to defuse a series of bombs. It's a great contrast to the edgy suspense of the rest of the game.

Advance Wars

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Nintendo** Developer: **Intelligent Systems** Price: **$40 (£27)** Release: **Out now (US) Q1 2002 (UK)**

This unassuming turn-based strategy game (an update of the Japan-only *Game Boy Wars*) could easily be bypassed on the shelves – certainly the packaging and screenshots do little to enthuse – but to miss out on this little gem would be a crime of *Bangai-O* proportions.

Advance Wars relies on established laws of strategy games: opponents take alternate turns; units have pre-set limits on movement and range of attack; terrain imposes constraints on visibility and movement; and each commander has to manage their resources in terms of fuel, ammo and build capacity. Indeed, anyone even vaguely familiar with these long-standing precepts will pick up and play *Advance Wars* in a heartbeat; everyone else will need to take a moment or two longer.

With all the multiplayer modes and in-game options, Nintendo has left no stone unturned in an effort to cater for all gaming contingencies









Advance Wars' presentation is polished throughout, with neatly animated menus and helpful advice. The ever-present anime styling is thoughtfully incorporated

Before getting into the guts of the game, the player must first complete the tutorial section. This is divided across 13 missions (plus one additional Intelligence-based mission), and covers all aspects of play, from basic troop movement through to climate and its effect on combat. Once these missions have been successfully despatched, a further range of options is unlocked enabling you to play the single-player Campaign game, indulge in one-off games in the War Room, and even construct new battlefields in the Design Maps section.

Killing fields

Each battle consists of a single map with the usual array of artefacts: rivers, mountains, forests, buildings and so on. There are specific victory conditions for each mission, although the majority consist of annihilating the opposing forces, or capturing their HQ.

The game eases you into the action with small sorties against the enemy using ground troops, artillery and tanks. Subsequently, you're introduced to missile launchers, aircraft (copters, fighters and bombers), plus naval craft (landers, cruisers, battleships and subs). In a full-blown battle there are 18 different units at your command.

All featured ordnance requires fuel and ammunition: the APC is used to ferry supplies around the map and, certainly in more extensive conflicts, should be protected at all costs. Once a unit runs out of shells, it's effectiveness is massively reduced – but if it runs out of fuel it's removed from the game entirely. Aircraft are especially susceptible, as they burn a stack of fuel and constitute your most valued hardware.



Advance Wars in full flow. The shaded squares around the red infantry unit show how far it can move, the arrow your intended destination. A blue airstrike is surely only moments away...

Constructing new units relies on having buildings to generate wealth; capturing neutral and, eventually, enemy buildings increases your income, and thus ability to create weapons of mass destruction.

And that's pretty much it: *Advance Wars* beautifully encapsulates the essence of the TBS, and in so doing removes any of the peripheral complexity that can unnecessarily bog down more expansive titles. There are still enough variables to contend with, but play remains engagingly fluid.

Over 100 battle maps and an impressive array of gameplay options ensures longevity, while a battery back-up prevents over-exposure to the lengthier conflicts. With all the multiplayer modes and in-game options, Nintendo has left no stone unturned in an effort to cater for all gaming contingencies.

In short, *Advance Wars* is supremely entertaining. Each battle is a tense, yet fascinating affair, as the balance of power ebbs and flows, gradually shifting towards the eventual victor. It has all the frenzied addiction of a puzzle game, and is as enthralling as a good book. This is the game GBA was made for. Superb.

Edge rating: Nine out of ten

Airblade



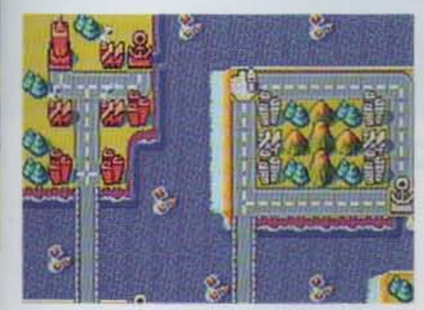






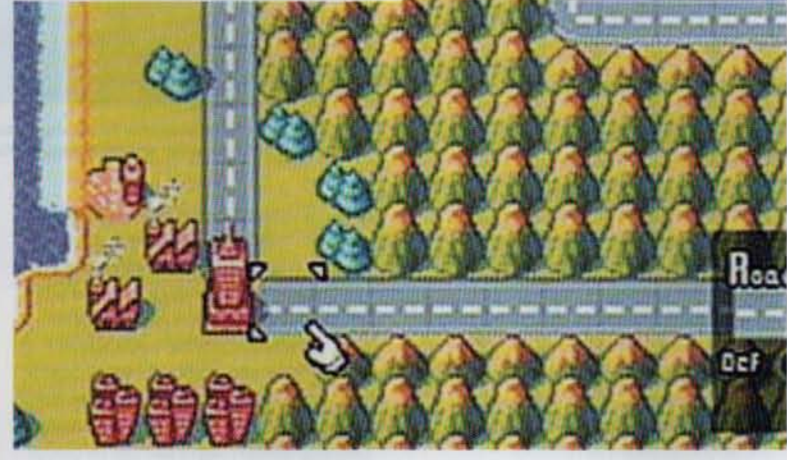


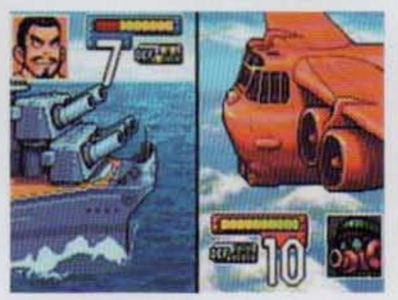
(Above) An enemy infantry unit capturing a neutral building. (Above left) If the music or animations offend, they can be turned off

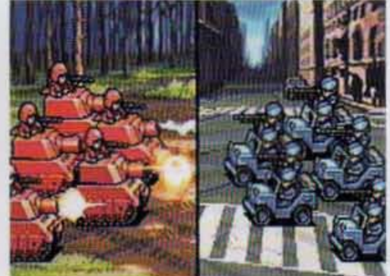




A map building option lets you create bespoke battlefields. These can even be swapped with other players via the link-up option







Individual skirmishes are visualised with animated sequences. They have no influence on the outcome, and can be turned off, but it's rewarding to watch the demise of a particularly irksome enemy unit

Multi-multiplayer

Perhaps in an attempt to make the title more appealing, Nintendo's Intelligent Systems has incorporated pretty much every play option imaginable: as well as the oneplayer campaign, there are pre-set maps to play in Vs mode, with any combination of human and/or computer opposition. And then there's the full array of multiplayer possibilities utilising one-to-four players, one-to-four machines and one-to-four game paks.

The Single-Pak mode provides a cut-down version of the game, limited to three basic maps. Multi-pak mode offers the full array of in-game options, but still locks players out of the action while awaiting their turn, other than to idly scroll around the map. In this instance, it's probably just as effective to use a single machine and pass it around. The only difference being that you don't have anything to occupy your hands between turns.

Airblade

Format: PlayStation2 Publisher: SCEE Developer: Criterion Games Price: £40 Release: November 9









The set piece objectives that have to be overcome in Story mode require the player to pull off specific stunts or grinds. The problem is that having to repeat the same trick over and over again, owing to the game's tight time constraints, can become increasingly tiresome

TrickStyle was a game that featured a breathtakingly intuitive pseudo-simulation of hoverboard physics. Sadly, any enjoyment garnered from sublime handling was undone by structural problems that undermined the impact of an inspired physics engine. Unbalanced checkpoints and an arbitrary difficulty curve drained the essence from the game. *Airblade* offers a chance for Criterion to dust off its *TrickStyle* game engine, and to house it within a construction that does it justice. The question is, does *Airblade* fulfil *TrickStyle*'s potential? Well, yes and no.

The structure that has been adopted for the follow-up is convincingly comprehensive in terms of play modes and multiplayer options, with an intriguing narrative-based Story mode forming the mainstay of the game. A suitably counterculture plot sees the game's protagonist, Ethan Palmer, challenge the corporate might of the sinister GCP over the course of six levels, ranging from the enclosed urban environs of the initial Hideaway level, to the expansive skylined Corporate HQ mission, tricking and grinding as he does so. Indeed, an intricate and elegantly conceived series of rails and jumps elevates the vertical scope of just about every environment in the game, with immensely satisfying results.

Completing missions in Story mode unlocks these areas for more leisurely exploration in Freestyle Mode, or more frenetic stunting in Score Attack mode. There's also a series of modes aimed at twoplayer competition, ranging from the straightforward Score Attack to the more specialist Trick List and Ribbon Tag. The latter is particularly well-conceived, producing some pretty frenetic competition. On top of this a Party mode, which enables up to eight players to take part in a knockout contest via a single controller is typical of the attention to detail that has been heaped upon *Airblade*.

But in terms of handling *Airblade* isn't a patch on *TrickStyle*. Whereas the latter offered a brilliant implementation of analogue control, it would seem its successor has suffered from a bid to capitalise on the



Airblade is an excellent showcase for the visual capabilities of Criterion's *RenderWare* engine, both in terms of character animation and the lovingly crafted mission environments, such as Corporate HQ (above)

immense success of the *Tony Hawk's* series. One manifestation of this is the broader range of outrageous stunts that players now have at their disposal – each rendered with a visual panache that is a great advert for the capabilities of Criterion's middleware tools. But the side-effect is a twitchy control dynamic that bears more resemblance to a digital input system. Thanks to this tweaked handling, collision responses can be difficult to anticipate, with the airblade careering wildly against obstacles, and items such as lamp-posts taking up a disproportionate amount of space. Occasional camera glitches also contribute to a waywardness that can be difficult to master initially.

The real problem, though, is once again to be found in the game's structure. The Story mode is an innovative effort to transform the set-piece objective structure of the *Tony Hawk's* franchise, but in practice it doesn't quite work. The game imposes a chronological constraint on meeting mission goals, which are uncovered by completing them in sequence. The result is that each level must be attempted in a series of 'Groundhog Day'-style forays in a bid to learn the layout of increasingly complex environments. The level of repetition that results can get quite frustrating, and the increasingly annoying soundtrack will probably be quickly switched off as a result, but it's the sense of artificially prolonged gametime that really grates. While other modes do offer a more freeform approach to explore the full extent of the combo scoring system, they don't really offer an adequate level of incentivisation to compensate.

Which is a shame, because *Airblade* does have a lot to commend it. One of these days, Criterion will unlock the unalloyed pleasure of its hoverboard engine. It's just unfortunate that it hasn't quite done so yet.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

The structure that has been adopted for *Airblade* is convincingly comprehensive in terms of play modes and multiplayer options

Commandos 2: Men Of Courage

Previously in E86/E99/E101

















As well as the visceral enjoyment of performing a somersault from a particularly tall building, stunts and combos are also rewarded with a boost meter, which can be used for temporary boosts of speed and longer jumps – essential to fulfil mission objectives in the allotted time

Bits and pieces

It's clear that Criterion has lavished copious attention to detail on *Airblade*. From the elegant front end to the requisite unlockable costumes and characters, it's an extremely well-presented title. Perhaps the best example of this though, is the Making Of... featurette that has been included thanks to the wonders of DVD storage. Presented by 'Bits' girl Emily Newton-Dunn, it's not as engaging as it might be, and would have benefited immeasurably by better editing, but surely more developers could follow Criterion's bid to demystify the development process.







Commandos 2: Men Of Courage

Format: **PC** Publisher: **Eidos** Developer: **Pyro** Price: **£45** Release: **Out now**







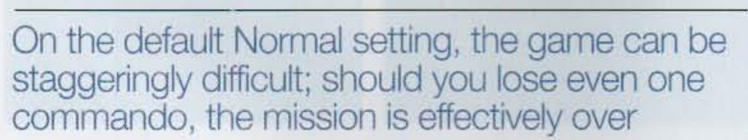


Commando 2's attention to detail is stunning, from guards' cone-of-vision, to the top of the Eiffel Tower, to cupboards and lockers in building interiors

If the generally held theories of sequel design are to offer 'bigger, better, more' or 'the same, but different', then *Commandos 2* aims to deliver on all counts. Subtitled *Men Of Courage*, this is the eagerly anticipated follow-up to the original *Commandos: Behind Enemy Lines* and its de rigeur, cash-in expansion, *Commandos: Beyond The Call Of Duty*. Like previous outings, it serves up realtime, squad-level combat in a gritty World War II wrapper.

More than just 'Commando & Conquer', *Commandos 2* challenges the player to complete a series of movie-inspired, puzzle-strewn missions. There are ten of these scenarios in total, ranging from a sprawling operation set on the iconic 'Bridge Over The River Kwai', to a lengthy gun-busting mission inspired by the 1961 film, 'The Guns Of Navarone'. For each scenario, players assume control of between one and seven commandos – Special Forces soldiers who possess unique abilities and weapons. The Sapper, for example, is the only soldier who can handle explosives in the game. The Diver is, by definition, quite handy when it comes to underwater work, while the Spy can wear enemy uniforms to walk amongst the foe almost unnoticed.

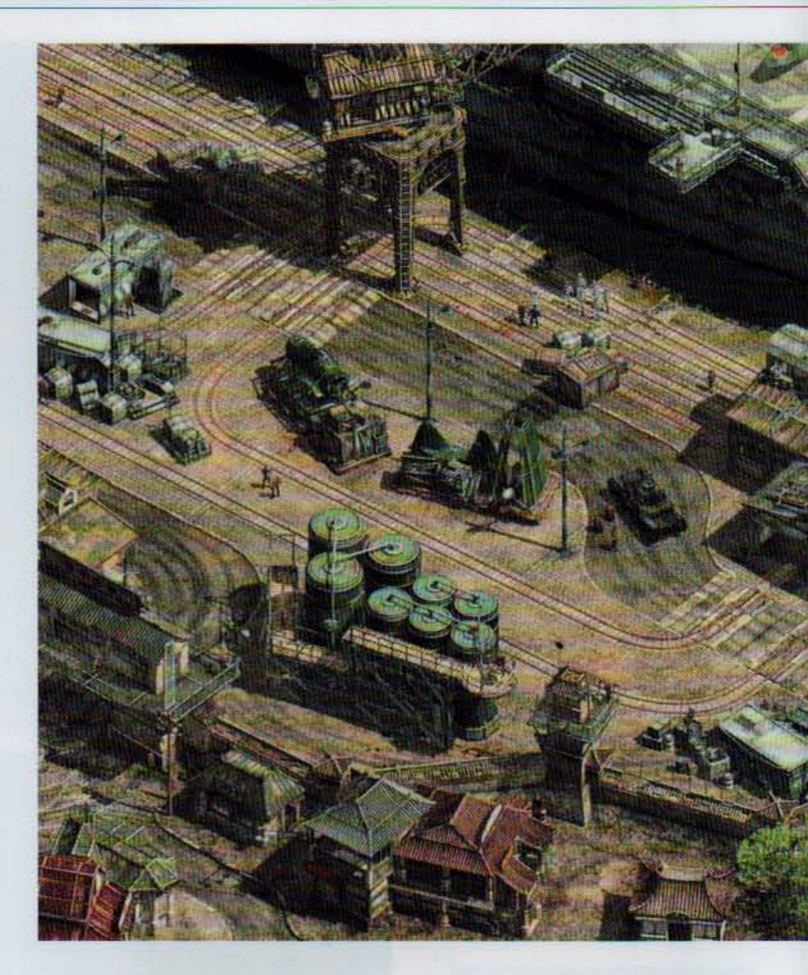
The basic idea behind *Commandos 2* is straightforward, even if playing it isn't. The player must utilise the assigned commandos and their different skills to complete each scenario's pre-defined mission objectives. After two hand-holding tutorials, the game throws you in at the tactical deep-end, infiltrating a heavily-guarded German base using only one unarmed soldier. There's very little information about how to do it, or which way to go. And while commandos can be equipped with a variety of weapons, from knives to machine guns, Molotov cocktails to



On the default Normal setting, the game can be staggeringly difficult; should you lose even one commando, the mission is effectively over

bazookas, *Commandos 2* rewards a stealthy approach rather than gung-ho heroics. In short, this game requires pre-planning, good timing and lots and lots of patience.

Consequently, the missions need to be completed slowly, methodically and above all quietly. While commandos can be instructed to shoot the enemy, the sound of gunfire tends to alert surrounding troops to their



presence. Instead, strategies rely on hiding around corners, crawling, swimming and distracting guards so that compatriots can creep past unseen. Like *Metal Gear Solid*, the German and Japanese opponents have a visible cone of vision that shows where they are currently looking. Avoiding them, enemy soldiers can also be silently knifed, or knocked out, tied up and dragged out of sight. There are so many options and approaches available. No wonder there are more than 100 hours of gameplay here – although most of it is spent watching how the enemy move and then waiting for the right moment to dispatch them.

All of this nervy, point-and-click action is realised in isometric 3D, and boasts an attention to detail that makes a mockery of the word 'breathtaking'. The exterior landscapes, which range from the icy wastes of the Arctic to the streets of Paris, can be rotated, zoomed and viewed from four different angles. The interior locations are also fully-rotatable, blessed with the same high levels of artwork and design. As you progress through the game, the sheer scale and size of the missions soon becomes apparent. With no loss of detail, developer Pyro simulates the Colditz prison for one mission, with 100-plus locations in the main castle alone. Add to this tally the locations in all of the buildings that surround the castle, and this mission shifts from being simply daunting to downright frightening.

Other features deserving of a brief mention are the co-op multiplayer option, the hidden 'bonus' levels, the joys of flamethrowers and even joyriding in tanks. Thankfully, with so many options and abilities – defusing mines, drugging soldiers, setting off remote-controlled bombs, etc – the game employs a usefully intuitive interface. Accessible via a sidebar or hotkeys, even controlling the nine characters available in the

Previously in E83/E85/E97













final Paris mission (including a dog) is not as difficult as it may seem.

Nevertheless, the challenge offered up by *Commandos 2* can often prove to be intimidating. On the default Normal setting, the game can be staggeringly difficult; should you lose even one commando, the mission is effectively over. There are two more difficulty levels above Normal – Hard and Very Hard – that make the guards smarter, the alarms blare longer, and the damage incurred by your men much greater.

However, by blending the depth of a turn-based wargame with the easy accessibility of an RTS title, *Commandos 2* rarely fails to impress. Refined and revamped, the franchise looks better than ever. Admittedly, there's nothing dramatically new on show, but arguably there didn't need to be.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten

(Top) Although commandos can use machine guns and rifles, the most effective weapon is the knife, as wielded by the Green Beret and the Driver. (Middle) The spy is used to distract the guard on the wall, allowing the Sapper to cut through the wire fence and defuse the minefield. (Bottom) The Sniper packs a M1903.30 Springfield rifle which trades off limited ammunition for silent, long-range accuracy

(Top right) The Driver's talents allow him to drive or pilot large vehicles, including this seaplane. (Above) Look through a doorway and you're treated to a picture-in-picture view of the room within

Let slip the dog of war



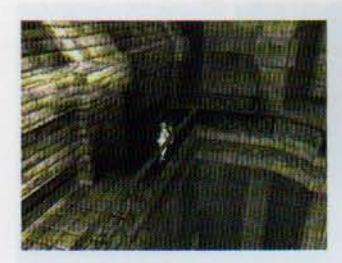
The tactical essence of *Commandos 2* boils down to using the right commandos, in the right place, and in the right way. The Green Beret, for example, is strong and a master of silent killing, while the Driver not only controls any vehicles in the game, but can also throw Molotov cocktails and smoke grenades. Alongside these two, the Diver comes equipped with SCUBA gear for extended wet-work, the Sapper is the explosives expert, and the Spy can pass himself off as an enemy officer. The Thief is able to climb walls and pick locks, while the Sniper is a deadly, long-range sharpshooter. There's also a commando dog. It barks.

Ico

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEA** Developer: **In-house** Price: **$50 (£35)** Release: **Out now (US)**

Define *Ico* as an arcade adventure; define an arcade adventure as a game in which the driving force is discovery and adventure, but one that requires some level of co-ordination to progress. It's a withered genre now, but 15 years ago it was at its creative and commercial peak, illustrated by the pull-out maps in the centre pages of magazines. *Citadel*, *Castle Quest*, *Atic Atac*:

It's a progression of multi-room mindgames, curled Escher-style in an architecturally stunning stone polygon construction









Saving takes place at glowing couches, and both Ico and Yorda must be present. When the player reloads, the children awake sleepily on the stone furniture

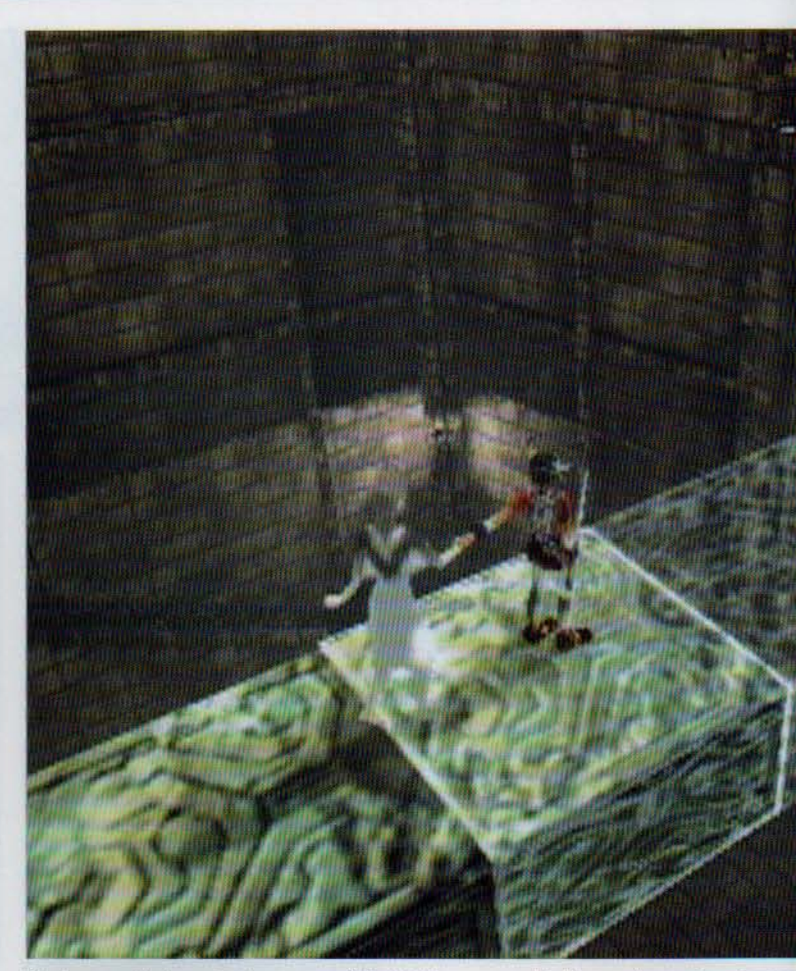
Diagrams of single-screen rooms, lain out side-by-side, moulded into castles and embellished and pencil crayoned into imaginations nationwide. *Ico* is like one of those castles, except for *Ico* feels like something better, something more solid. *Ico* feels real.

From the moment the game gives you control over the hero of the title – a small boy damned by superstition and imprisoned in a gigantic fortress – it's clear *Ico*'s emphasis is on atmospherics. Broadly, the exploring dynamic is similar to *Tomb Raider*, but it's handled with much more style and subtlety. There are no energy bars, no object lists, no incidental music, just a clean cinematic third-person view and the sound of *Ico*'s footsteps in the echoing hallways.

Fixed cameras, usually synonymous with survival horror, portray the action, but you can pan them around each room using the right analogue stick. The left stick controls Ico himself, and while the sweeping point of view can confuse, Ico's uncanny ability to cling to any ledge in the face of fatal drops means Lara's sudden death syndrome is usually mercifully absent.

That's not to say you don't find yourself in situations where pixel-perfect leaps are imperative – an even better reference point than the *Tomb Raider* series is *Prince of Persia*, where both timing and logic had to be impeccable – but they're handled adequately, and preceded by save points.

Besides running, jumping and climbing, Ico can also pull levers, push blocks, and manipulate simple objects to get through the pre-ordained puzzles – and that's where the focus lies. In essence it's a linear progression of multi-room mindgames, curled Escher-style into an architecturally stunning stone polygon construction.



Glowing green blocks require the presence of Yorda to trigger an event, in this case the creation of a stone bridge spanning a cavernous room. The architecture below reveals its purpose later in the adventure

With the introduction of Yorda, a mysterious young girl also imprisoned in the keep, the game takes another twist. She's perfectly captured, so pale she's almost cel-shaded, but her beauty's almost incidental: she is innocence and fear, and Ico has to play her protector. R1 calls her towards him, and when she's close enough she grabs his hand. Simple, kid psychology, like the way she flinches when Ico strikes his weapon against the stonework, or the small movements she makes as her gaze follows the castle wildlife. It works, because it forges a relationship, and it makes the player care.

As well as striving for her freedom, there's also the same sightseeing drive that pushed gamers through adventures back in the mid '80s. And what sights; elegant, mournful, and dreamlike, they push you past each of the *Boxxle*-style puzzles and onto the next stop on your fairytale chartered holiday. Take in the scenery, imprint it in your memories.

Or take this one, perfect, game-defining recollection. When you venture outside the polygonal stonework towers for the first time; when you look back on the ledges and spires that you've just been exploring, the chains hanging from windows, the shadows creeping down the walls; when you gaze out across to other parts of the fortress you've yet to visit and see them solid, reaching into the sky; when you do all of these things, it's like you're looking at a centre-page map, delicately shaded with grey and green pencil crayons. It looks magnificent. It feels real.

Edge rating: Eight out of ten

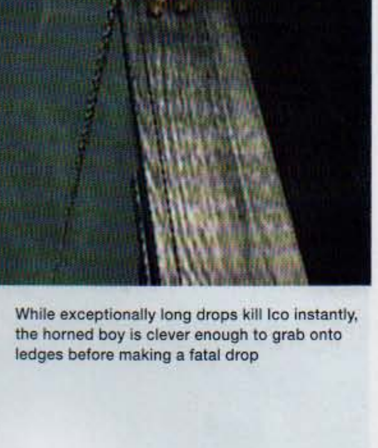












While exceptionally long drops kill Ico instantly, the horned boy is clever enough to grab onto ledges before making a fatal drop





While fighting is simple, it's certainly dramatic. Take a swing at an enemy and your weapon (in this case a wooden stick) passes straight through them, scattering misty black cloudforms across the screen



Yorda can't climb chains, so when the travellers encounter them, Ico has to leave her behind, usually to free up another way up or down. By holding circle and using the analogue stick, you can make Ico swing



Shadow boxing

Leave Yorda alone for too long, or encounter one of the pre-defined combat moments, and she's attacked by creatures from the shadows. If he can reach her in time, Ico can fight the inky villains with whatever weapon he has to hand. Combat is simple, based entirely on repeated presses of the X button, but adds some tension to proceedings. If Ico's not quick enough, or if the creatures prevent him from rescuing Yorda, she's dragged down into one of the shadow pools, which means Game Over time.

Dark Native Apostle

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Virgin** Developer: **Hudson** Price: **£40** Release: **November 30** Previously in **E92**/**E103**









Although enemies can be dispatched with bombs, constant respawning discourages battles. It all gets repetitive very quickly



Box of delights

DNA proves once and for all (if ever proof were needed) that scientists really are a mucky bunch. Littered throughout this game are many clue-packed documents which will help your hero on the path of self-discovery, from power generator manuals to bio-chip instruction guides. *DNA* will certainly improve the reading age of younger players, although it's a pity so many of the other mental challenges rely on trial and error, rather than skill.





The unnamed nemesis of *DNA* infects the memories of the hero from time to time. Although flashbacks occasionally give vital clues, the only real fact known at the start is that the protagonist's name is B13

If it were two hours later, it would be half as long until midnight as it would be if it were an hour later. What time is it now? The options: 18:30, 20:00, 21:00 or 23:30. If you enjoy grappling with such Mensa-style logic problems, then Hudson's *Dark Native Apostle* may be the game for you. Others, however, could find its insistence on protracted corridor wandering, interspersed with ridiculously elaborate puzzles, about as much fun as filling out a tax return form.

Which is a pity, because the developers have injected a great deal of imagination into *DNA*. Set in a technologically advanced future, where geneticists have perfected human genome technology, your hero wakes up in a lab cell only to discovers that he's been implanted with bizarre nano-technology, but no idea (as yet) how to use it. As tradition decrees, he can't remember how he came to be there or how his special powers operate, thus neatly delivering the scenario into your hands. Here's your chance to piece together the mystery on your own wits and initiative.

The hero's bio-chip capabilities illustrate most clearly the game's ingenious spirit. Scattered throughout *DNA*'s many locations are silicon chips which you can collect and then insert into four slots on your character's left hand. Experiment with combinations of these and you'll slowly learn how to activate your hero's different special powers to your own advantage. An example: early exploration in the sewers reveals a route blocked by whirling air fans. Reprogram your bio-chips correctly and you can speed-burst through these unharmed. Sure, not the most imaginative of challenges, but still head and shoulders above the usual *Resident Evil* fare.

Early promise, however, soon turns to relentless backtracking and respawning enemy hell. Reach the laboratory facility, and to progress further you must transfer power from one energy source to another, shutting down elevators and switching door security systems off. Given the labyrinthine nature of the areas, this requires some intense mental athletics and much tedious exploration.

There are witty touches: the ability to spot invisible objects with a special scanning skill, for instance, plus the chance to use weapons such as samurai swords. Almost enough to make **Edge** overlook the more onerous duties imposed by the game's design. Ultimately, though, it's a chore. (And if you're still wondering, the answer's 21:00.)

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Cosmic Smash

Ace Combat 4

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Sega Rosso** Price: **¥5,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now (Japan) TBC (UK)** Previously in **E**87/**E**90

The screenshots are enticing, the gameplay summary more so: imagine a *Virtua Tennis* character playing *Arkanoid* in Tron's squash court, and you're pretty much there. There are echoes of *Super Monkey Ball* here, not least in the reductive ethic, but also in reinvention of a long discarded dynamic. The player avatar hits a ball against coloured bricks until they disappear, and when the court is clear, the player moves onto the next level.

The game structure is based on something resembling a map of the London Underground, and on completing a level, the cosmic train moves to the next stop and a new set of pastel bricks. Occasionally, forks in the track provide an opportunity to move to a different line, and give rise to routes of varying length and difficulty. But none are too challenging, and it's conceivable that, if you adjust to the control system quickly, you'll complete *Cosmic Smash* on your first attempt.

Transitional difficulties

That doesn't matter in the arcade, because it's a show-off game, demanding and rewarding an over-complicated approach to every shot. But here, taken out of its natural environment, it loses some of the elements that made it special. It's fine racking up huge scores with slo-mo under-the-leg mid-air finishes, but when there's no one around to see it, much of the satisfaction disappears. There's no twoplayer mode, either, which is a chronic disappointment. It's easy to wonder if the effective minimalist ethic so visible in the screenshots has pervaded too far through *Cosmic Smash*'s design team. The presentation is exemplary, both in the understated audio and curved, beautiful, simplistic visuals, but the game itself betrays its primitive influences much too often.

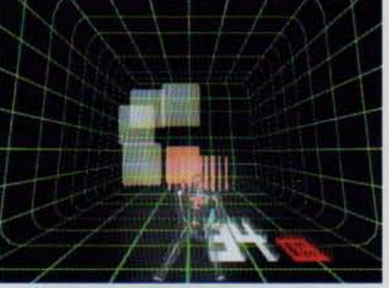
If *Pong* or *Arkanoid* hadn't already been invented, the stylistic innovation that marks *Cosmic Smash* might be starker, and perhaps it's a brave move to try and reinvent something so simple, especially when you're disguising it in retro-themed futurism. But, brave, derivative, or otherwise, *Cosmic Smash* doesn't have enough of a hook to demand your attention. It's a diversion – a beautiful one, sure, as stylish as anything else on the system, but a diversion nonetheless – and only those who treat it as such will fail to be disappointed.

Edge rating: Six out of ten









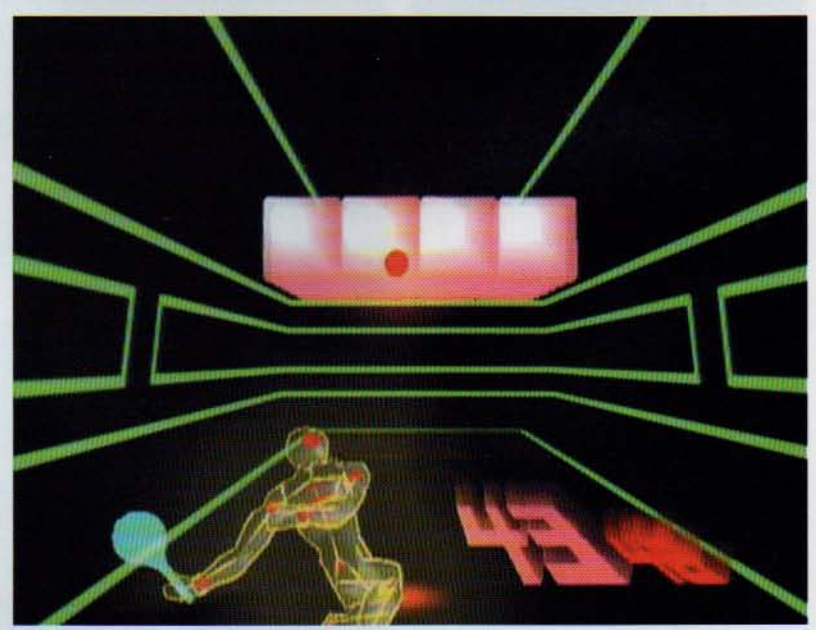


After game over, your route is displayed. High scores can be posted on the Internet by jotting down a code, which, while a cute enough idea, serves mostly as a reminder of how Sega's Dreamcast online dream is over



Every second counts

Cosmic Smash's route to game over relies on time, rather than lives. The game begins with 80 seconds on the clock, and completing a level gives you an extra 20. Losing a ball only costs the time it takes to serve again, but using the special move button, which racks up the points and powers the ball through multiple blocks at once, also causes the clock to move much quicker. Those who find the constraints punishing can adjust them in the options screen, but as usual, the default setting is the most well balanced.

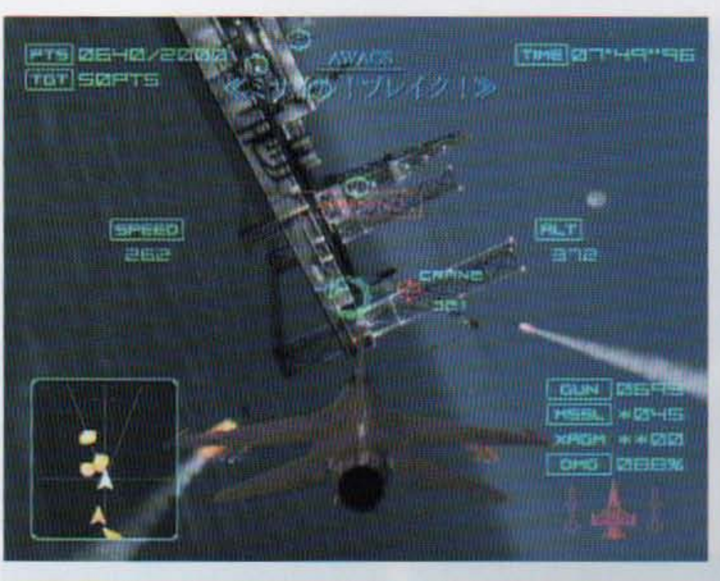


Press the Special button, and your avatar charges up for a powerful hit. A powered-up ball will pass through as many blocks as it encounters, but time passes much more quickly while the shot is being executed

Ace Combat 4

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E94**









Targeting occurs automatically, although pressing the triangle button switches rapidly between the nearest enemy installations. Once new bombs and weapons are acquired the game really opens up and provides players with many more strategic options



Arms dealing

Namco fans will be delighted to hear that new aircraft and weapons can be purchased *Ridge Racer*-style. Points are awarded for completing missions, number of hits, and time bonuses. The acquisition of stealth craft and laser guided missiles acts as a good incentive for going through to the end of the game.



Although the visuals are truly impressive at high altitudes, fly anywhere close to the ground and the textures begin to swirl sickeningly. The game never quite loses its sluggish sense of speed. *Ace Combat 4* is more 'Flying Doctors' than 'Top Gun'

Shooting black dots against blue skies: this is the fundamental gameplay flaw which has plagued the majority of modern flight combat games. Advanced radar technology, jet propulsion and heat-seeking missiles preclude the necessity of getting up close and seeing the whites of your opponent's eyes. But while Namco's *Ace Combat 4* still suffers from these requisites of modern warfare, a degree of excitement has been injected through the use of dramatic replays and splendid cockpit views.

Set against a hackneyed conflict in the year 2004, your missions range from standard dogfighting to the destruction of important military bases deep behind enemy lines. One of the main complaints is the poor sense of speed conveyed by the textured landscapes. Even when hugging the ground at Mach 3 there is never a real sense of g-force inducing velocity. And while all Namco's slick presentation values have been lavished in every area of the front end, the PlayStation2's lamentable VRAM limitations are all too obvious. Above an altitude of 300 feet textures give a wonderful impression of city-scapes and military installations. Go in close, however, and everything goes into a blur giving the impression of streets full of '70s semis replete with pebble-dashed exteriors.

Manual override

This is not to say the acquisition of air targets and the bombing of ground installations isn't fun. It's just that gamers have been there before, bought the farm and received the medal. Casual observers might comment that this is just another watered down 'arcade' version of all the flight sims which proliferate the PC market. But while *Ace Combat 4* does not require keyboard overlays and ring-bound manuals, it does attempt to provide more depth than an updated *Afterburner*.

The sense of combat is also enhanced by excellent radio communications and the occasional exclamation from a team mate – 'die you S.O.B!' screams one in a particularly tense situation. Such details increase the sense of drama and excitement when up against enemy MiGs. And avoiding explosive shockwaves by flying low through canyons is just one of the imaginative touches which elevate Namco's fourth *Ace Combat* game above the average. But after initial missions are completed things soon become a little stale and repetitive.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Gekibo 2

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Irem** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£39)** Release: **Out now (Japan) Q4 (UK)**

Previously in **E**103

If you've not played the PC Engine original, coming to terms with the concept behind *Gekibo 2* may be difficult. Even after completing the game, it still almost defies description: there are elements of a scrolling shooter, elements of *Missile Command*, and elements of *Pokémon Snap*, all played out across the backdrop of 14 street-sketch caricature landscapes.

Your street photographer avatar slopes across each world, the analogue stick controlling both his movements and those of an on-screen shutter. The shutter, rather than the character, is the focus here: on pressing R1, it captures whatever's beneath it, and, depending on your snapping skill, scores points and provides replacement film. It also serves as a shield against things which might otherwise cause injury; take a picture of an object spiralling towards the player paparazzo, and it'll disappear, leaving bonuses and points in its shadow.

Photo opportunities

There are three ways of interacting with the environment (four if you count the jump action which shifts the camera perspective and allows shots behind or inside objects). The other three – zoom, flash, and the act of taking a picture – cause some of the background dioramas to change and give rise to increased point-scoring opportunities. Using them becomes increasingly important in later levels, where the target score required to pass through gets obscenely high.

Point scoring isn't the only objective, though, as specific moments must also be captured on each level. Other shots can trigger bonus levels – snapping the LOAX sign in the background of one level sends you to *Gekibo*'s parody of Akihabara – and as well as the single must-have photo, an album keeps a record of the other Kodak moments you've captured in each level.

The pacing is curious, representing more of a delicate amble than a frantic dash for the perfect picture, due to the shutter's restricted speed of movement. This introduces strategy at the expense of instinct, but also – to the game's cost – makes each level much more reliant on memory. And that's the game's key weakness: that at times success devolves into pre-determined patterned response. But after initial worries that *Gekibo 2* might simply be a novelty, it turns out to genuinely deserve your perseverance.

Edge rating: Six out of ten







A matter of import

Those who choose to import *Gekibo 2* may have some problem working out exactly what it is they're meant to be shooting in each level, although some pictorial assistance is given on the level select screen. More patient gamers can wait for the UK release, where *Gekibo 2*, rebranded as *Polaroid Pete* and complete with associated (and, judging by Pete's licentious appearance, unlikely) licensing deal, will be published by JVC. It's a surprising decision, given the majority of gamers' propensity for sticking to what they know, but the lower price point of £30 may see it rewarded.



(Left) The techno slum of *Gekibo*'s mock Akihabara is full of sci-fi parody, including a dancing C3P0 and an unmasked Terminator. Giant robots aren't in short supply, either







The key to *Gekibo* is waiting for the perfect shot. You might get points for capturing two Kendo fighters in full flow, but you'll get even more if you grab the moment when one of their weapons starts to bloom

Lotus Challenge

Format: **PlayStation2 (version tested), Xbox** Publisher: **Virgin** Developer: **Kuju Entertainment** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E88**/**E95**









Damage is well implemented with the vehicles' handling altering convincingly (top). Of course, you get to select the realism level before a race



And for my next trick...

The Challenge mode sees you become part of the Lotus team, racing against fellow Lotus drivers from around the world. In addition to one-on-one races you're expected to do your fair share of stunt work (for a Hollywood film or tyre commercials, for example), and take part in a series of increasingly difficult car-related tasks, such as car bowling and penalty shoot-outs, which provide a much needed extra layer for what could otherwise have been just another racing game.



Like its cars, *Lotus Challenge*'s Tarmac environments' variety is pleasing (you'll even find an Alpine section of switchbacks). Sense of speed, while realistic, can at times be affected by the lack of trackside objects

Times are tough for realism-heavy racers. Standing out from the crowd has become essential if any commercial success is to be enjoyed. There are no guarantees, of course, and with the market in its current state, the chances are titles get overlooked, regardless of the quality of their content.

Lotus Challenge already has plenty on its side: a desirable licence allowing the game to include a commandingly comprehensive line-up from the Hethel-based automobile manufacturer – anything from the diminutive Lotus 7 to the firm's F1 contenders; proficient use of the PS2's rendering flair in order to establish worthy environments, both detailed and convincing; and an inspiring array of activities for players to experience – staple championship-based track racing features prominently, naturally, but in addition you can engage in a series of challenges which form the game's absorbing Story mode.

Given Lotus' involvement in their development, the handling dynamics were always going to lean towards the simulation end of the scale. The resulting package offers an interesting – if not entirely convincing – realism/gameplay hybrid. From **Edge**'s perspective there's still too much emphasis on authenticity, which can occasionally prove problematic if you're holding a DualShock2 (GT Force and Speedster 2 support is offered) – the precision required to keep a vehicle on the limit can be psychologically crippling. True, you can resort to the various driving aids but, as ever, some feel overly intrusive.

The same could be said of the opposition AI, which too often appears to ignore your presence, thus causing a frustrating (and time consuming) track-side excursion. Yet, even on their best behaviour you're never in any doubt as to the artificiality of your competitors – they can certainly race their way around a circuit, but they're too rigid. They lack character.

Which, ultimately, is *Lotus Challenge*'s major blemish. Everything feels too controlled. An over reliance on authenticity for some of its elements ensures the game is caught in no man's land – still a long way from engaging the player in the way that the Dreamcast's stern *F355 Challenge* does, for example, while also unable to provide anywhere near as much fun as this month's *Burnout* (see p70). It's a competently developed titled that should certainly find itself a devoted audience, albeit a smaller one than perhaps it could have done.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Sky Gunner

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **SCEI** Developer: **In-house** Price: **¥6,800 (£38)** Release: **Out now (Japan)**

Previously in **E102**

Forget the French anime stylings and story-mode RPG overtones. *Sky Gunner* is a 3D shooter played straight, cast in score-attack-frenzied chain explosions and defined by its esoteric method of destruction. Movement is unrestricted, but the targeting system makes the game more akin to *Panzer Dragoon* than a retro-futuristic *Ace Combat*.

Pressing the triangle button locks the camera to an enemy, so all you have to do is steer in the right direction and open fire. The target box is twitchy and the system takes some getting used to, but it fits the hyperactive setting perfectly. The flying is forgettable, but the gunning relentless: skies are packed full of twisting opponents and spinning shrapnel, and millions upon of yet-to-be-reaped points.

It's not the most obvious analogue, but *Sky Gunner* seems to follow a promising ethic initially seen in Koei's *Dynasty Warriors 2*. Rather than use the PS2's processing power to up the polygon count on each of the enemies, it chooses to place lots of them on screen at once. The frantic nature of the game means the cruder construction of the foes isn't obvious, either. That's when the game stays frantic. Sadly, that's not always.

Stop-motion graphics

Draw another parallel with *Ray Crisis*. What should have been a spectacular shoot 'em up played straight gets badly wounded by occasional attacks of irredeemable slowdown. This isn't how a game based on instinct should work. Players should never find themselves caught in 30 seconds of freeze-frame, especially when said moments halve the screen resolution and reduce the image quality to N64 levels.

If you can forgive that, you'll find *Sky Gunner* works well, because it's slick, satisfying and as shallow as a game based around score attack modes needs to be. The competition for points with your two AI-controlled wingmen adds some impetus to the killing, and the idiocy of aerial opponents and lack of tension in dogfights merely underline the game's beaming, imaginative stupidity: Fireworks explode, cartoon enemies snap, pastel parachutes tumble to the ocean floor, and the points by your name rack up in their millions. It's not as thrilling as it sounds, or indeed as it ought to be, but, shocking stop-motion aside, it's an interesting attempt at *Galaga 3D*.

Edge rating: Six out of ten







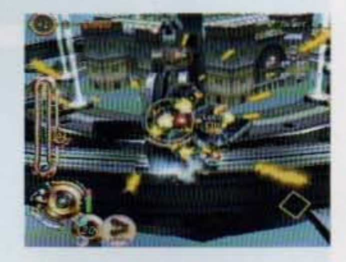


Bosses are creatively designed and beautifully executed: here, the radial struts on a floating ring must be knocked out, but first the player must deal with the robot who slides around the ring repairing them





Characters provide commentary on your actions and further *Sky Gunner*'s story, although those who don't speak Japanese may have problems



Stupid stunts

One reason why *Sky Gunner* fails to ignite is the forgiving nature of your craft. Sustain too much damage and you spiral downwards, shedding points, but with the chance to right yourself by hammering the joypad's face buttons. Collide with opponents or scenery and you suffer no damage at all, just clumsily bouncing against the other object until you move away. Understandably, there's little thrill making a sharp twist under a low bridge when you know there's absolutely zero risk just smacking into the side of it.

Ecks Vs Sever

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **BAM! Entertainment** Developer: **Crawfish Interactive** Price: **£35** Release: **Out now**













The blocky, heavily pixelated enemies and scenery will bring *Wolfenstein* rushing back to mind, but *Ecks Vs Sever* has the compelling gameplay as well. The sniper rifle (above) is fun



The infrared goggles provide a 'Predator'-style view of the level. The battery life is short so speed is of the essence

Suddenly, it's like the '90s never happened. Go into mission one of Crawfish's mini-FPS and you're back in *Wolfenstein* territory: chunky enemy soldiers, sparse background scenery – and, of course, aiming on a 2D rather than true 3D plane. Life was simple back then.

Yet, *Ecks vs Sever* has learned a few lessons from the last ten years. The excellent sniper rifle (press fire to activate the sight, then zoom in on your target with the shoulder buttons) is pure *GoldenEye* – as are the sections where you have to crawl through air ducts – and the infrared goggles used to navigate dark hallways owe a debt to *MGS*.

Level designs and gameplay objectives (usually find key and exit) will all be familiar to iD veterans. You'll also find yourself using old, half-forgotten tactics, like learning the position of enemies and approaching them from any direction they're not facing to get in a free shot. On the subject of shooting, the use of real weapons – including an M16 and machine pistol – adds an edge to the mostly formulaic arsenal.

Controls are surprisingly intuitive. Modern day FPS purists may baulk at using a D-pad but it provides an effective mouse substitute. In fact many will be taken straight back to their first keyboard-controlled *Doom* sessions, before 3D standard-bearers like *Quake*, *Descent* and *Marathon* made the mouse an obligatory pet. The only slight problem is having to cycle through your weapons using Select: it's tiny and larger thumbs will often hit Start by mistake.

While the single player missions – 12 for each character – become very samey, very quickly, the multiplayer options provide a great long-life extra. Deathmatch, Assassination and Bomb Kit (each player has to find the parts of a bomb and get them to a specific destination) modes can all be played in a variety of locations and they are all hopelessly compelling. Suddenly the esoteric world of 2D multiplayer FPS-ing is open to those who had no access to office or university LANs in the early '90s (i.e. before the mass explosion of the World Wide Web). Veterans will be weeping as they blast each other.

Its hands tied perhaps by the medium, Crawfish has done little to add to or explore the raw FPS format (a mistake with *Doom* lurking on the horizon, surely?). *Ecks vs Sever*, then, is an entertaining yet sometimes too familiar piece of nostalgia.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

The 'Vs' bit

The dual mission format means you can play as either FBI agent Ecks or NSA agent Sever, and then spend the game chasing the other through a conspiracy-led story. Each character's missions employ different but intertwining sections of the same bars, hotels, warehouses and streets. A neat idea…



One Piece Mansion

Format: **PlayStation** Publisher: **Capcom** Developer: **Capcom** Price: **£20** Release: **November**

Played out on an apartment block grid, puzzler *One Piece Mansion* sees you as panicked landlord to an increasingly mischievous set of inhabitants. Each tenant has the capacity to send out negative or positive feeling in eight directions, portrayed as blur and red arrows. The objective is to keep everyone's stress levels to a minimum by switching their rooms around or building new ones. Surround someone with too many red arrows and their stress increases, they start to emit more red arrows, and yet more bad feeling cascades throughout the building. The situation is exacerbated when squatters move in, or by obnoxious neighbours who can only be evicted by surrounding them with negativity.

A too-short story mode with a violently arched difficulty curve produces less satisfaction than it ought to, but, as with most of its peers, *One Piece Mansion* really isn't about gaming closure. Endless mode provides three levels of difficulty, and enough of a challenge to keep experienced puzzlers going for as long as interest holds. How long that'll be depends on your patience, but once the dynamic's locked inside your head, it's difficult to kick it out.

Edge rating: Six out of ten



Place too much stress on a squatter and their room blows up, taking the squatter with it. A map in the bottom right corner provides a handy summation of your tenants' progress. Seeing red is never good





Once all your rooms are full, you have to build new ones to accommodate any new tenants. Remember to build lifts, too, or they'll never be able to reach ground level

Silent Scope 2: Dark Silhouette

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Konami** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40** Release: **December**



As with the first offering, time bonuses are received for making that perfect head shot. While some might say the game loses its focus without the excellent arcade rifle, the one-shot dynamic is still rewarding





The sensitivity of the analogue control is crucial when targeting the moving bosses. Some may find it frustrating

Silent Scope has been – and always will be – about that coin-op cabinet rifle: its weight, your finger on the trigger and that natty sight for pixel-perfect obliteration. Absolute bliss. Still, *Silent Scope* on the Dreamcast (**E**91, 7/10) came as a pleasant surprise, with the Sega machine delivering sharp graphics and smooth control, despite the lack of rifle-in-hand sensation. The PlayStation2 version, however, was always rather inferior. Fundamental difficulties similarly afflict *Silent Scope 2*, Konami's anti-terrorist sequel.

The first of these is the DualShock2 analogue stick, which is just too sparky for the tiny shifts of scope required for effective sniping. You can adjust the sensitivity, but to do so dramatically curtails your response speed. Second, the graphics are too rough to do their job correctly. It's virtually impossible to pick out bad guys until they're highlighted (by which time valuable seconds have slipped by).

Konami has incorporated iLink capability for twoplayer action and offers two distinct storylines, but it would've been wiser to address the control and visual niggles before embarking on these more ambitious enhancements.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Time Crisis II

Format: **PlayStation2** Publisher: **Namco** Developer: **In-house** Price: **£40 (£50 G-con2 bundle)** Release: **Out now**





The usual incessant slaughter is punctuated by boss shoot-outs and attack from massed armies of fruit



Time Crisis' gung-ho gunplay is now extended across a range of varied backdrops. Sadly, the narrative is still played out 'on rails': your actions on screen have no effect on the route taken, which remains linear

Having started out as a full-on coin-op experience, *Time Crisis II* hasn't transferred all that brightly to the living room confines of your PlayStation2. From start to finish, the skillfully conceived G-con2 will spend only a smattering of minutes in the hands of a proficient virtual marksman – hardly £40's worth of entertainment.

There are extra incentives, of course. Like its coin-op forebear, individually screened cooperative twoplayer fun is an option (via an iLink set-up). And if your partner gives up, you can plug a second gun into the PS2's remaining USB port for some satisfying two-fisted John Woo moments.

More likely to extend longevity, however, are the extra games, although the training mode and ageing Namco lightgun-based coin-op offerings might struggle to keep you as occupied as Crisis Mission, a series of oddly compelling challenges.

Namco's *Time Crisis* franchise enjoys heightened status among lightgun aficionados, but is hardly a profound experience. This latest instalment is more of the same, albeit a neat diversion from other meatier challenges.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Planet Monsters

Format: **GBA** Publisher: **Virgin Interactive/Titus** Developer: **Planet Interactive Development** Price: **£35** Release: **November 7**

Basically a brazen reworking of the *Pengu* block-sliding mechanism, with a nod to *Pac-Man* and just a hint of *Bomberman*, *Planet Monsters* is a rather odd little confection, the aim of play to simply destroy your three opponents by shunting blocks into them.

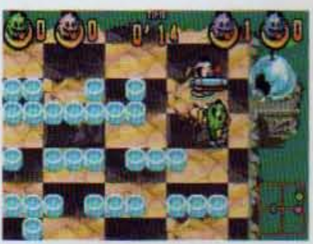
The level's indigenous inhabitants roam the arenas, and although deadly to the touch are dim enough to pose only a minor threat – you can easily block-kick your way to freedom. The action is divided into eight themed 'planets', with five levels in each, including a boss round, which involves repeatedly kicking blocks up-screen at your opponent, shoot 'em up-style.

Utterly derivative, *Planet Monsters* is a mildly entertaining, though short-lived diversion. Play is frantic, and there's a real sense of foreboding throughout. Enough, in fact, to assure genuine relief once you've dispatched your final opponent. As play continues, so the levels grow in size and complexity, with a password system standing in for battery back-up.

The game's real downfall is its lack of variety, and a single game-pak multiplayer mode conspicuous by its absence. There's a multipak option, but finding three other *PM* owners could prove tricky.

Edge rating: Four out of ten





(Top) A boss segment with shoot 'em up sensibilities brings a little variety to the samey gameplay. (Above) Weapons are used to hamper rather then kill outright



Each of the eight planets features its own species of creatures, objects and themed graphics. However, other than providing some aesthetic variation, progress through levels is a case of 'bigger and harder'

Driven

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **BAM! Entertainment** Developer: **Crawfish Interactive** Price: **£33** Release: **Out now**

With gameplay slotting in somewhere between *Micro Machines* and *Super Sprint*, Crawfish's latest GBA effort, an isometric Indy kart racer based on the Stallone film, will be familiar fare to petrolhead veterans. It's pre-3D revolution stuff, where keeping to the line becomes the stuff of pinpoint mathematics and the lightest of left/right touches is all that's necessary to weave between two of the other 11 cars in each race, round the corner and through the checkpoint.

Hit other vehicles or the side barriers too often, though, and eventually your kart will explode, sending you right to the back of the pack. Gameplay, then, is ultra-tense, particularly on packed tracks so skinny they could be modelling for Calvin Klein.

A variety of options are available, including Arcade and Championship modes, as well as the unusual Story mode. Here you take on the role of each of the film's main characters, performing a series of races and driving tests. A little tenuous, perhaps, but fun.

Whatever the mode, there's decent variety in the circuits and the visuals are crisp. The solo challenge may be short-lived, but a four-player link-up will have old *Super Sprint* fans clamouring for more.

Edge rating: Seven out of ten



Pixel-sensitive road handling and bottleneck courses encourage collisions aplenty. Take too many hits to your kart, though, and you're sent to the back of the pack – after an eye-pleasing conflagration, of course





(Top) Smooth driving is rewarded by an 'in the zone' performance boost – though in this version it's more like being on fire. (Above) *Driven* features the kind of cute visuals and road dynamics that should endear it to fans of *Super Sprint*

MX Rider

Format: **PlayStation2 (version tested), PC** Publisher: **Infogrames** Developer: **Paradigm Entertainment** Price: **£40** Release: **Out now**

Previously in **E**102



Paradigm is to be applauded for trying to integrate a management simulation with staple 3D racing action, but the game engine isn't as impressive or flexible as its counterpart in *Excitebike 64*





Early previews whetted **Edge**'s appetite, but *MX Rider*'s final incarnation still lacks serious gaming bite

Oh dear. **Edge** had relatively high hopes for this Paradigm-developed super/motocross and freestyle venture. Apart from the attraction of being able to compete in three differing facets of the two-wheeled off-road championship circuit, there's something to be said for the developer's attempt at fully integrating players into the action by providing aspects of management not usually found in this type of title.

So when entering a season, race fees and travel costs have to be taken into account, with good results prompting better mid-season offers from rival teams (the contract may stipulate consistent top three finishes, for example, although all expenses may be covered).

This doesn't detract from the deficiency of the game's handling model, however, which has sadly failed to evolve since **Edge** played preview code. The bike/rider combination lacks flexibility and controlling – there's little of the finesse found in *Excitebike 64*, for instance. Opting for the 250cc and 500cc bikes may make things faster, but only enhances the problem.

Admittedly, there's fun to be had from the various game modes – just don't expect a consistently engaging or particularly smooth ride.

Edge rating: Five out of ten

Zero Gunner 2

Format: **Dreamcast** Publisher: **Sega** Developer: **Psikyo** Price: **¥5,800 (£33)** Release: **Out now**





Fans eager for a surfeit of pyrotechnics will be satisfied with the livid explosions and fire effects in *Zero Gunner 2*



Expect the usual panoply of bosses and foe-obliterating weapon arrays. Turn Markers provide an unexpected and welcome strategic twist, though, enabling the player to pivot and aim in any direction

For a genre that many gamers consider obsolete, *Zero Gunner 2* strives to inject a dose of invention, if not quite generating the accompanying sense of panic which would herald true shooter stardom. As such, expect the staple fare of varying weapons, swathes of enemy flak and hefty boss-vehicles.

The control method, however, is something else: each player helicopter is able to release a Turn Marker, enabling the craft to pivot and effectively aim in any direction. Such a novelty opens up a new plane of strategy – with enemies able to appear onscreen from any angle, the player is forced to navigate a constantly-shifting flight path to remain in the game.

The energy bar denoting ship integrity is even more noteworthy: impacts deduct health, but collecting crystals from vanquished foes replenishes it. Cunningly enough, releasing the fire button draws the crystals towards you. Survival is thus a subtle balance between destroying all and drifting defenceless, guns inactive.

For the most part, *Zero Gunner 2* satisfies, but is relatively short and certainly a shade easy. That said, Psikyo's latest will stem blasting fans' hunger for a little while longer.

Edge rating: Six out of ten

Phalanx

Format: **Game Boy Advance** Publisher: **Big Ben Interactive** Developer: **Kemco** Price: **£35** Release: **November 23**

All the typical hallmarks are present – myriad layers of parallax scrolling, a flaccid, token intro, an audacious arsenal of both weaponry and special attacks, plus a pathologically-spiked difficulty curve, where death means the simultaneous loss of both power-ups and hope.

Phalanx is virtually a direct facsimile of the SNES original, an affable but slightly unwieldy side-scrolling shooter. The only cogent addition to the GBA port is a visually-underwhelming smart bomb which rids the screen of any enemy ordnance, providing extra leverage during the more demanding encounters.

But at times bullets and backgrounds are mere hues apart and the diminutive GBA screen isn't conducive to the sudden evasive manoeuvres required to avoid such offensives, rendering the action more frustrating than challenging.

As a title designed to bring a classic experience to an unaware handheld audience there are far more deserving candidates than *Phalanx*. Even as a title designed for retro-fawning navel-gazers, it errs perilously close to the anachronistic.

Edge rating: Five out of ten





Shooter fans will recognise the scenery from the original; the smart bomb is a neat addition, but hardly reason to revisit



While the parallax scrolling impresses (and, thanks to the 3D age, it's the first time Edge has been able to say that for seven or eight years) the sluggish control and unimaginative weaponry lets *Phalanx* down

The making of...

Sensible Soccer

There are probably more videogames of the footballing ilk than any other. But for all the FIFAs, Kick Offs, Championship Managers and ISSs, there's still one title that holds a special place in gamers' hear

The year is 1992. Sanctions would soon force Yugoslavia out of the European Cup, and the FA Premier League was about to begin its first controversial season, but by far the most significant event in football that year – if not the decade – was taking place in a small set of offices in March, Cambridgeshire; the offices of Sensible Software.

It began the year before. The six staff at Sensible, already one of the top development teams on the Amiga 500, were in a long and difficult final stage of development for their new god-game, *Mega-Lo-Mania*. The game had originally been based around space technology, but – inspired by Peter Molyneux's *Populous* – Sensible made a last-minute decision to set the game on a fictional planet, base it loosely around the history of English warfare and add tiny little men to roam over the land.

"It was the toughest end development phase I can ever remember," recalls **Jon Hare**, *Sensible Soccer* artist and designer and Sensible Software co-founder. "The game just needed to be tuned, it was all about resource management, and it was really difficult – serious long hours for a long, long time."

To relax, the six of them played a lot of *Kick Off II*. Anco's football game was far from perfect, though, as the close perspective meant you frequently couldn't see who you were passing to, and the suspense often arose from the game's famous bugs instead of from the skill of the players: would your goalkeeper fall asleep, or would the game hang? The problems grated on the Sensible team.

Then, one stressed afternoon,

Format: **Commodore Amiga, Atari ST**
Publisher: **Sensible Software**
Developer: **Sensible Software**
Origin: **UK**
Original release date: **1992**


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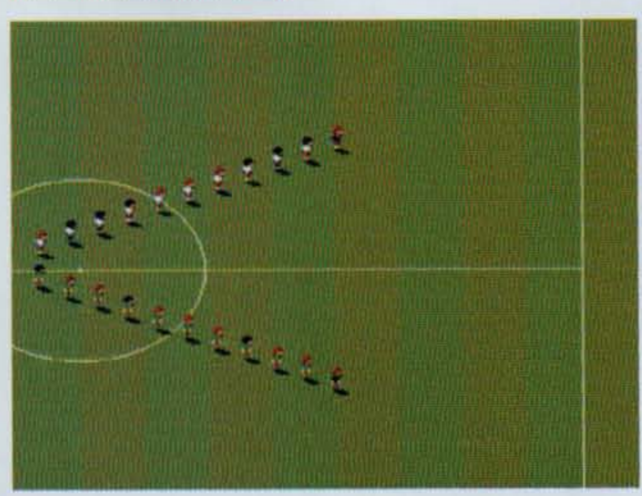
Jon Hare decided the hard-working populace of their new game needed a break too, so for a bit of light relief he dressed 22 of the *Mega-Lo-Mania* sprites for a game of football. "It took me ten minutes," a laid-back Hare remembers. "I'd been making the Romans, and the cavemen, and then we stuck them in football kits." The development team put the men on a patch of hastily knocked-up turf, and "we saw the perspective was good: you could see more of the pitch."

They kept the up-down scrolling, added a ball, and fairly soon they were having a kick-about. Within a month, Sensible Software had a publishing deal for its new title: *Sensible Soccer*.

Released just in time for the European Championships, the game quickly became a universal favourite, scoring above 90 per cent in almost every magazine review, and 'Game of the Year' in a string of Amiga publications. There had been football games before: the fixed-perspective top-down view and up-down scrolling were familiar; but the scale of the men – just 12 pixels high – meant you could see far more of the pitch when playing. Taking a corner, you could now see your players in position around the goal. You could boot the ball forward and know someone was there to receive the pass. Like in the real game, attacks had to be built, mistakes were punished and it only took a second to score. And at the end of the day, it was the team with the most goals that won.

At the heart of *Sensible Soccer*'s appeal was the intuitive and flexible control system. The unique after-touch facility gave you unprecedented control over the ball: in the moment after a kick, a tap

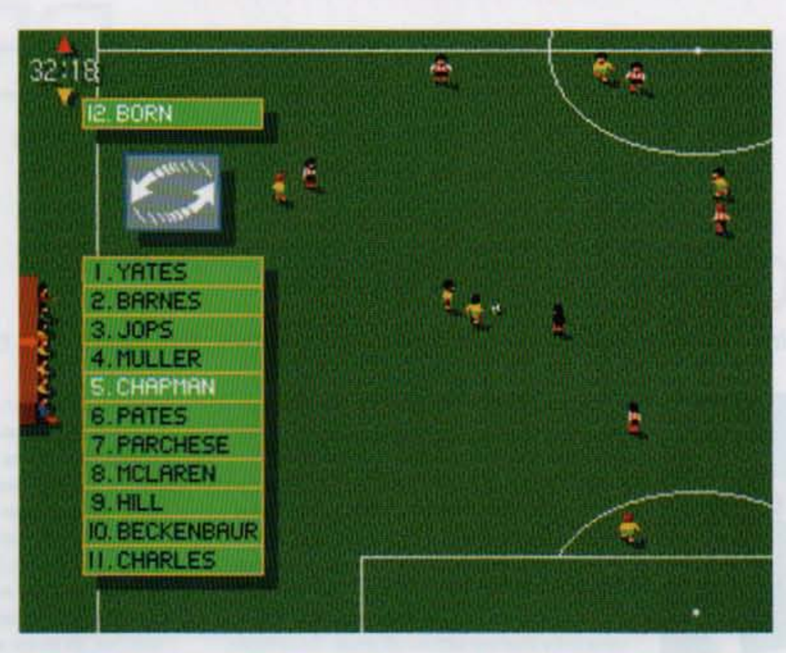








Despite its seemingly laid-back approach to game development, Sensible ensures all its titles – *Soccer* included – feature flawless design and an intelligent range of options



Among the raft of genuine player names available were a handful of the Sensible team, including programmer Chris 'Chrix' Yates and artist Jon 'Jops' Hare – the original Sensible duo

towards another direction added spin or lift; sideways for a curved shot, back for an up-and-under. The system worked without possession too: you could dive into a sliding tackle, angle the joystick, and redirect the ball towards your well-placed striker. The quicker the after-touch was applied, the more exaggerated the resultant bend. Ball control got harder the faster you ran, and at full tilt an overly-rapid change of direction often meant losing possession. They were simple ideas, but in combination the flexibility seemed endless, and the skilful moves seemed to echo the real skills of professional football.

Jon Hare ascribes the fluidity of the controls to Sensible's informal attitude to development. "It was trial and error," he says. "You can't write a control system down on paper. If the control system doesn't work, you have to change it, and if you change the control system, sometimes you have to change the whole game. So it's really an organic process."

Around the pitch, Sensible built a menu system which provided the usual control over the circumstances of the match: you could choose from eight formations, swap players, and choose the length from three to ten minute games – ten minutes being, as always, a long time in football. During the match, three taps on your joystick called up the bench where you could substitute players or re-assess your formation. The game offered instant replays, collected into highlights; and you could even save a batch of highlights to show at the weekend, for that 'Match of the Day' moment.

But the main feature which set *Sensible Soccer* apart was the new distant perspective and the space that it afforded. Hare agrees: "The game works because there's a lot of space to pass into. When you play football, you're not looking at yourself. You're looking at what you're going to do with the ball. You're thinking, 'I've got half a second before this guy's running into me: where can I kick it?'" Despite being only 12 pixels high, the players were – in their bug-eyed, cartoon way – absolutely convincing, even seeming to open their mouths in appeal after a foul.

However, as is often the case, most of this detail was an illusion. "*Sensible Soccer* was just a guy in three frames: legs together, then right leg forward, then left leg forward," explains Hare. "People would say, 'He's chesting it down, he's volleying…' What happened was the ball would have hit him about chest height and he'd kick it. The ball was just three frames too. The thing with football is that you know it well, and your head fills in the gaps."

The game quickly became a universal favourite, scoring above 90 per cent in almost every review, and 'Game of the Year' in a string of Amiga publications

Space was key, too, in the amount of context left out. "A lot of what you don't do is as important as what you do do," outlines Hare. "If we had put specific chants in certain stadiums, then people would have noticed the chants aren't there in other stadiums. If you've got this general chant going on in the background, people might imagine at Anfield they're singing 'You'll Never Walk Alone'. It's general and ambiguous, and your brain fills in the rest."

Where details were included, Sensible took great care to make sure they were accurate. The game was the first to use real teams and player names. Sensible had one contractor, a European football journalist whose sole responsibility was to ensure players were up to date. "It's important to draw people in," says Hare. "When you have a lot of real footballers, like we did, people start to care about individual players on each team. People swore they could control the goalkeeper, when they couldn't. Or they swore this player was better than that player. What you have to do is give people space to believe it."

The illusion of reality and smooth flow of play was supported by a whole range of subtle behind-the-scenes touches, again developed through trial and error, as Hare explains: "If you are pushing directly up the pitch, but the ball is actually 15 degrees off, the game will point you towards the ball. It's really helping a lot: bringing supporting players in, taking them out of position, in order to keep the game flowing without the player realising."

The heuristics the team used for the computer's tactics were basic and effective: each player was assigned a box, and his position within that box was determined by the location of the ball on the pitch. All that remained was to time when the computer players tackled, when they took shots and when they passed the ball. Hare remembers: "It was all quite simple really." In fact – surprisingly, given the game's reputation for innovation – the development team is of the opinion that *Sensible Soccer* had little that was technically new. Hare calls it a 'bread and butter game': "It's just a football game, know what I mean?"

But to the game's millions of fans (1.5m units were sold, and Hare estimates the ratio of pirated copies to originals at ten-to-one) *Sensible Soccer* was always more than just a football game. Sensible set its stall out early doors, and then pressed its advantage home: a string of almost yearly releases kept the teams up-to-date, and added new features to tweak the gameplay. With release 1.1 the goalie was more responsive; there were red and yellow cards; even different pitches (a dodgy pitch being a great leveller). Later refinements were to include *Sensible World Of Soccer*, with 1,500 teams, 20,000 players, and a Career mode for managing a team; and even *Sensible Soccer '98*, with 3D perspectives. But the original *Sensible Soccer* was always the one that would go down in history.

Is there anything in the original game people still might not have figured out? Hare is an ardent Norwich fan, and he admits to fixing the figures a little: "I think we did tend to favour our own teams a bit. Players I liked, my favourite Norwich players, I probably tweaked the stats up a bit, because I like them. You've got to. You don't want your favourite guy out there looking like a monkey."

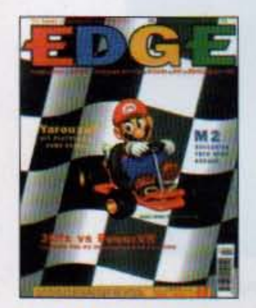
No. Especially not one 12 pixels high.

RESET

Where yesterday's gaming goes to have a lie down

reload

Examining gaming history from **Edge**'s perspective, five years ago this month



Issue 39, December 1996

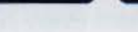
Long before the *Black & White* dual cover of **E**80, **Edge** had the opportunity to use a similar good versus evil split dynamic thanks to the imminent prospect of *Mario Kart 64*. On the front was Mario, on the back was Wario – and in the middle an extended preview of the disappointing racing follow-up from "the Mozart of console gaming". But ignore the Shigsy fawning and the rarely fascinating ten-page feature on PC graphics cards. The interesting moments of **E**40 came in the interview with ex-US airman David Rosen, co-chairman of Sega enterprises, which provided a revealing snapshot of a company still evangelising the Saturn as an alternative future platform. One anecdote recalled the problems the company had installing a photo-booth in Tokyo's Iraksho district. "What we didn't realise was that one has to pay their respects to the local... uh... call them what you will. I hesitate to think of a name. [...] We didn't realise that this particular party was so sensitive to the issue. He sent some emissaries to tell us of his displeasure." Unnerving stuff. Hell, it's almost enough to make you want to get out of the hardware business completely.

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?
"So if you're a gamer and the above your desire, then take your place upon our spire, where we will climb up to the top, and all take a feather from the weather cock" A fraction of East Point Software's 34-line recruitment advert/poem.

DID EDGE REALLY SAY THAT?
"After all, anyone remember nVidia?" A news article on the future of PC graphics acceleration scoffs at 2001's video card monopolists.

TESTSCREENS (AND RATINGS)
Tomb Raider (PS; 9/10), *Privateer 2: The Darkening* (PC; 9/10), *Star Gladiator* (PS; 7/10), *Toonstruck* (PC; 8/10), *Destruction Derby 2* (PS; 8/10), *Disruptor* (PS; 7/10), *Daytona USA CCE* (Saturn; 7/10), *Pandemonium* (PS; 7/10), *Batsugun* (Saturn; 7/10)





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1. An early look at "Konami's warehouse rave" – *Metal Gear Solid* 2. Activision's stylish *Interstate '76*, featuring Groove Champion 3. An advert for the newly launched Game Boy pocket 4. David Rosen muses over Sega's strategy, past and present 5. Lara scores 9/10, unaware of her Jolie-fied future 6. Some kind of unstated victory for Sid Meier at Develop '96

pixelperfect

The industry's favourites from yesteryear. This month, Reflections Interactive's **James Rutherford** busts out of *Captive*'s chokey





James Rutherford revisits an old friend in the guise of Mindscape International's *Captive*

The year is 1991. FTL's *Dungeon Master* looked impressive, but hocus pocus did nothing for me. *Captive* was different. One captive in a room with his virtual briefcase, controlling four droids for a daring futuristic jail-break. So far so good.

The game booted up, the briefcase opened and I was commander of my mercenary team armed with a polygon space-map. I landed on some planets, hunted around and slapped wild dinosaur – I found no hint of the lush interiors the screenshots depicted. Unlike most players, I actually read instructions. They didn't help. The game went back in the box, the box to the cupboard and I went back to the games I knew. End of story. Almost.

One week later, I opened the briefcase again. By chance, I landed in the correct place, found the correct clue and the rest was freedom-fighting history. I even discovered that a droid's name influenced its stats. The best one? I never found out.

After weeks of remote pacing, I prepared myself for the ultimate encounter – a door between me and a small room. I prodded the door to reveal a single captive with his virtual briefcase. He leapt up. Startled, I shot him. RATT, you win again.

FAQ

Charles Cecil

Founder and MD of Revolution Software Ltd



What was the first videogame you ever played?
Space Invaders.

What was the first computer/games machine you owned?
A Sinclair ZX80. It had so little video RAM that the screen switched off while it used the processor.

What was the first thing you ever created for a computer or console?
A roulette simulator which proved that it was possible to win a fortune by following a set of rules. I've yet to test the results in the real world.

What was your first job in the industry, and what was the first thing you ever designed?
My first game was *Inca Curse*, a text adventure for the Sinclair ZX81, published in 1981.

What's your favourite game and why?
At ECTS I was waiting for a meeting, noticed an *R-Type2* cabinet and started to play. I'd forgotten quite how good the game is. The learning curve is perfect – the power-ups appear at just the right moment – and the graphics are fantastic. One always assumes we look back at past video games through rose-tinted glasses, but this is one that certainly stands the test of time.

What was the last game you played and what did you think of it?
The *MGS2* demo. Technically extraordinary. Control system excellent. It will be fantastic. I just hope that it doesn't take itself too seriously.

How many hours a week do you spend playing games?
About two. It's a disgrace, but I simply don't have time to play as much as I should. I don't find games as addictive as they used to be – maybe I'm getting old, or maybe something is being lost as we strive for ever more impressive graphics.

What's the first game you look for when you walk into an arcade?
I enjoyed *Time Crisis* and *Jurassic Park*, and some of the racing games. I've fond memories of *Out Run*.

What's your favourite book, album and film of all time?
Recent titles that have hooked me include the first two Patrick O'Brian naval books, and 'Love in the Time of Cholera' by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. My music taste is quite retro and conservative – the last album I bought was Dido's 'No Angel'. Otherwise, I listen to David Bowie, early Stones and even some of the better punk bands. My favourite films are 'Pulp Fiction', 'The Usual Suspects' and 'Casablanca'.

Which web site do you most regularly visit?
The BBC's, which is one of the best and most informative web sites around (www.bbc.co.uk). Otherwise, I'm a great fan of the Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com).

What game would you most like to have worked on?
Final Fantasy VII. Square understood perfectly the techniques required to draw the player in – so at that pivotal point of the game you felt compelled to exact revenge. Sure, much of it was realised in hugely expensive CGI, but the look, feel, script and characterisation – especially when combined with the recurring musical themes – really was a triumph.

Of all the games you've been involved with, what's your favourite and why?
Probably *Broken Sword 1*. It had so many new ideas, it drove the adventure genre forward, it had a compelling story and it was great fun to create. Now, however, the point-and-click genre is totally dead – and we fully intend to evolve the adventure genre with our next game, called *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon*.

What stage is your current project at?
We're currently reaching the end of pre-production on a game called *Good Cop Bad Cop*, which was featured in **E**99.

Which aspect of it do you think will impress players the most?
The lush graphics, novel gameplay and a really intuitive interface which enables the player to have great fun in the environment. We're calling the game 'the Ultimate Cop game' and while our competitors have written linear bog-standard 3D shooters, this will be much more subtle and, ultimately, more fun to play.

"Currently, the market rewards developers that create derivative products – and then everyone complains about a lack of originality"

What new development in videogames would you most like to see?
I look forward to the day when entertainment hardware runs so fast that technology is no longer the major issue. In the early days of film, it was the technologists that ruled the roost. This balance slowly changed to the extent that now it's possible to create a blockbuster, like 'Blair Witch Project', using a camera costing a few hundred pounds. With the advent of middleware, the games business is moving in this direction.

What disappoints you about the industry?
Currently, the market rewards developers that create derivative products – and then everyone complains about a lack of originality.

What do you enjoy most about working in the videogame industry?
I love the fact that the industry moves forward so fast. We're still in the pioneering stage – but, unlike most pioneers, there's a healthy market which rewards innovation.

Whose work do you most admire?
I most admire the Japanese companies, like Konami and Square, who are currently creating the most exciting advances in games.

What new gaming platform are you most looking forward to?
GameCube. Nintendo stole the show at E3 with *Starfox Adventure*, *Pikmin* and *Luigi's Mansion*.

What are your thoughts on mobile phone gaming?
It worked in Japan, so it should work here. But we need to move on from WAP and wait for the killer app that excites a European market!



Communicate by post:

Letters, **Edge**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW

Or email:

edge@futurenet.co.uk

Should Edge cover GBA? Of course it should. GBA is the future of gaming. Imagine carrying the power of PS2 around in your pocket, ready to play anywhere. Surely a vision of the future. Without the likes of Game Boy Advance pushing the envelope of handheld entertainment, these visions would never become reality.

We live in a world of miniaturisation and portability. Look at the way mobile phones have taken off. Take a look at just how much Nintendo has managed to cram into such a small package and you can't fail to agree that this is at the forefront of technology. Some new technology impresses with power, others with scale.

Interesting that no-one has mentioned removing PlayStation from the title yet.

Kieron Ward, via email

Perhaps "power of PS2" is overegging it slightly but, as is obvious from this issue, **Edge** has every intention of continuing to cover GBA. And as long as games of the calibre of *One Piece Mansion* keep appearing, **Edge** will continue covering PSone, too.

RedEye is right to point out in **E**102 that *Deus Ex* is better than the 'Big Brother 2' book, and I have examined elsewhere the areas in which great videogames are currently influencing other forms of art. But the modest point I made to BBC Online, in the interview to which he takes exception, still stands.

It is merely a question of simple practicality: if children play videogames at the expense of reading books, their horizons and future prospects will be limited, because ours is still a society that prizes and rewards functional literacy over gameplaying skills. And if RedEye never read any William Gibson, where would he get his inimitable prose style?

Furthermore, while I continue to argue that videogames are art, I would still insist that no videogame to date is as sophisticated a cultural artefact as the best literature. Indeed, to imply otherwise runs a risk of alienating the very mass audience that RedEye wants to convert, because the claim is so obviously hyperbolical and can thus be easily dismissed by the ignorant. Proselytism has to be realistic in order to work.

Still, I am glad that my book, 'Trigger Happy', which is stabilising RedEye's wobbly garden chair, is proving a little more useful to him than it has done to some other readers.

Steven Poole, via email

After reading the preview of *TimeSplitters2* in **Edge** this month, I couldn't resist a return visit to *GoldenEye* for some quality FPS action. The smallest of references brought back memories of some of my most enjoyable playing experiences: The first time I ran across the courtyard in the opening dam level (behind that lorry), ducked into the guard tower and took out an unsuspecting soldier with the sniper rifle was an eye-opening experience for me.

Okay, so I was fairly new to electronic entertainment then, but nearly four years on *GoldenEye* still maintains its fantastic atmosphere, with competitors struggling to match its brilliant level design, or to bring the genre forward in any particularly significant way.

After all, it's these small moments, the ones that really mean something to a player's personal experience, that make us love playing games in the first place. It's no coincidence that the best titles are those that can stir emotions to such an extent that you have to re-live the same point in the game again before you're fully satisfied.

I'm sure many have gone back to *Zelda 64* to ride across Hyrule field, or to watch the sun rise over Hyrule castle, for instance. I've recently been going back to work in *Shenmue* and infiltrating warehouses in *Metal Gear Solid* for this very reason. There are many more examples from all sorts of different games, and I'm sure everyone has their own personal favourites.

Hopefully *TS2*, with its own take on the FPS, will provide us with more of these experiences (even if it is at *GoldenEye*'s expense), along with the other potentials waiting for us over the next several months. Where's this going? Well, it's times like these that make me realise just how much I love videogames. And that can't be a bad thing, can it?

Harry Edmonds, via email

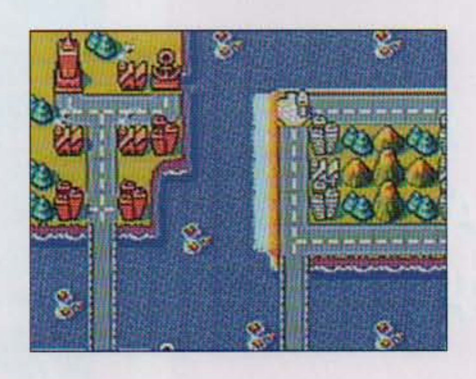
There's a certain joy to be had in revisiting games you've not played for months or even years, rekindling fond memories and bringing a nostalgic smile to the face. In this respect, you should no more throw away ageing, fondly remembered games than you should old photographs.

I've been an Edge reader for several years, so I'm now well trained to look for games references in the output of our culture and media industries, which are frequent and commonplace. I was particularly interested in your comments on advertising (**E**103). However, imagine my surprise when, through a lucky coincidence, I attended an IMAX screening of 'seminal sci-fi work', '2001: A Space Odyssey' only to discover that it's an undecipherable ad for PlayStation 2! Well done, Sony – and Steven Poole, what have you got to say for yourself?

Matt Turmaine, via email

In response to Chizo Ejindu in **E**102, who is obviously genuinely aggrieved by the lack of R&B music in video games. Although I agree to the fact (yes, R&B has little presence in the gaming industry), I can't help wondering how much thought he's put into his idea of music in games. First, it might surprise him to know that all good games producers put a *lot* of thought into this area.

The aim of the music is to reflect the feel and ambience of the game, and sadly there are few



Advance Wars on GBA – just one of many reasons why **Edge** should continue covering Nintendo's diminutive handheld



Code: Veronica on PS2. René Kneyber argues that's it's a scary title, but due more to the awful narrative than the schlock-horror visuals

titles, triple-A or otherwise that engender the R&B culture of which I assume he is so fond. His use of *Gran Turismo* as a platform for his complaint is a glaring example of misrepresentation. *GT3* is a racing game, and as such the producers have looked long and hard into finding the appropriate type of music to reflect this.

Had the game revolved around cruising long strips or freeways in souped-up factory model Japanese motors, I'm sure that R&B would have played a suitable part in it. Grunge, indie, Brit-rock: all synonymous with racing, speed, adrenaline. You could say the same of acid, dance or house, but these examples don't produce the right 'feel' for this particular game – for that look to such titles as *Wipeout* and *Extreme-G 3*.

Second, if you care to look at examples of games that do use R&B in the musical backdrops, I think you'll probably find a similar trend: basketball (you may think it's a stereotype, but the sport is predominantly black, as is R&B) being the prime example, And perhaps upcoming games such as *GTA3* and *Driver 3* will feature the same, with environments (though in a negative light, some may argue) often indicative of the kind of places and situations where you're likely to hear your favourite NWA tunes emanating from all directions.

I hate to sound like I'm stereotyping, but that is unfortunately the issue that we are dealing with here, and, even more saddeningly, it works for the games industry, at least in the main.

To finish, I'd like to draw your attention to misuse of a genre. *Wu-Tang: Taste The Pain*. How flagrant an exercise to publicise yourself? Take a fantastic game formula, previously unreleased because of its graphic nature, inject your own image, tone it down just enough to make it mainstream and throw out a second-rate game with as little thought or effort as possible. Why do no other fighting games use R&B as background music? Frankly, because it doesn't work. The game itself was fairly playable, but not so well suited to the genre which it tried (oh so very hard) to emulate.

Chizo, I'm with you… there's an awful lot of over-representation out there, but let's not forget it's not just down to the music. Gameplay is also responsible for representing different cultures. Until more game types inspired by specific cultures become commonplace in the shops, I fear you'll have to make do with the more popular, more conventional formulae.

Jon Brain, via email

Luckily, you are the critics of videogames and not of literature. To underline a point in **E**102's letter section, **Edge** gives the examples of modern games with a good plot, clever scripts and puzzles, naming: *Majora's Mask* (of course), *Deus Ex* (surely) and *Code: Veronica* (what the fuck?).

As a writer I cringe at the horror of most computer game stories and plots. Most games (and I'm especially looking at the Japanese here) tend to go way overboard on the cheese, disregarding any form of nuance or literary aesthetic. Just play *Final Fantasy VII*, for instance: the story is so subtle it is like being hit in the head by a blunt object. No mature character development or subtlety; just blunt objects and cheese. It's almost like a 14-year-old came up with it (which is, of course, still not as bad as a story by a 16-year-old). The story writer's biggest achievement (and one that he can be proud of) is that he actually managed to fill a 70-hour game with this drivel. And managed to do it on several occasions as well.

The reason why I'm getting upset about the above statement regarding *Code: Veronica* is because this particular example is particularly uppermost in my mind. The *Resident Evil* series has never been known for its subtlety and *Code: Veronica* ain't nothing different. You start the game and it's dark, but you can see the main character and a man standing in the top-left corner of the screen. You've seen him and your girlfriend has seen him. But the woman on the screen ain't seen him. She turns on the lighter. She sees the man (going to CGI mode.) Black man staring at her. She screams. Did anyone get scared? I sure did – I've never seen poorer execution! What was the point of that sequence to begin with? The horror of it was almost too much. Who are these people? And what were they thinking? It also made me afraid to play the game any further. What possible horror could be around the next corner? Could it possibly get any worse?

Indeed it did. Minutes later, I shut my PS2 down, choking with disbelief. Another Japanese horror I did not survive. Maybe it's just the cultural difference, but a game by a Japanese development studio is almost certain to piss me off completely in the story department. And I'm sure I'm not the only one as well. So, **Edge**, what were you thinking when you wrote that nonsense down?

René Kneyber, via email

Code: Veronica was mentioned in terms of the in-game visuals serving to heighten the overall experience. At no point did we suggest it was the very apex of videogame storytelling.

Having just read with interest the article in **E**102 'The Magazine Game', I was somewhat saddened by the lack of mention of any magazines for the good old Amstrad CPC 464/6128. Namely 'Amstrad Action', for one.

Why is it always the case with any retro article dealing with the 8bits that there is only ever reference to the Speccy and C64, and never the CPC? The CPC6128 was the first games machine I ever owned and I loved it to bits. At the time, I spent more hours than was healthy playing on it, so it's hard for me to understand why there is never any mention of this great machine.

It played just a big a part in gaming history as the other more commonly referred to games

'As a writer, I cringe at most computer game stories and plots. Most tend to go way overboard on the cheese, disregarding any form literary aesthetic'



The Amstrad CPC – a fine machine if all you wanted to play were hand-me-downs from the Spectrum or Commodore 64...

machines, yet still fails to get a mention. Okay, it may not have sounded as good or even performed some of the more complex graphics routines of its peers, but it was never outclassed. In fact, I remember times when the CPC version of certain games actually turned out to be better than its Spectrum or C64 forebears.

Even my C64-owning mates were amazed at how much better quite a few games were on the Amstrad. So, come on **Edge**, how about doing something on the Amstrad CPC? Even if it is only a couple of 'The Making Of...' articles on certain games? And if you have a lack of games hanging about in the office, I am more than willing for you to use some of my collection.

Dave Colls, via email

Sadly, the Amstrad CPC was – for the most part – a port station: the recipient of great games which had debuted on the C64 or Spectrum. However, 'Amstrad Action' was a pioneer of covermounted cassettes containing game demos and full software – and, in this respect, its omission was an oversight.

After looking through the latest issue of **Edge**, I have to admit that I was totally stunned by the reviews of the GameCube launch games. Let us start off, shall we, by saying that I was really looking forward to playing all three of the games that initially arrived (most of all, though, I wanted to play *Wave Race*). When my brother-in-law finally received his brand new GC (I am but a poor student and cannot afford every console that comes out), I just had to get my hands on it. Anyway, first in the machine (after admiring the dinky little disc) was *Wave Race: Blue Storm*. What an utter disappointment! The first thing to strike me was a sensation of déjà vu. This was the very same game that I played five years ago on import. Even the visuals weren't a huge leap. Granted, I cannot play the thing on HDTV, which would've made it look much better, but to find out the machine was not wired for RGB is an absolute disgrace! What was Nintendo thinking about, leaving out RGB connectivity?

Anyway having had enough of *Wave Race*, up next was *Luigi Mansion*. The game is stunning. After 20 minutes of play, though, you realise that this is nothing more than a technical demo. The gameplay becomes repetitive, the 'unique' humour at which you first laughed starts to irritate, and then you don't want to play the thing anymore. Even the stunning visuals can't hold your attention; you realise the reason they look so good is because of the pathetic size of the 'levels'. Maybe it's too early to say, but in my mind the big N is not half the company it was back in the 16bit era.

Finally, then, onto *Super Monkey Ball*. A simple game in concept, made by a great company. It has to be said, this game is an absolute blast! I still can't believe how instantly hooked I was on such an infuriatingly mad game. This is easily the best release on the GC. But what I find so strange is the fact that this is the first Sega game you've awarded 9 out of 10 that I can remember. Of all the great Sega titles that came to the Dreamcast (*Virtua Tennis* and *Jet Set Radio* instantly spring to mind), how come it's not until now that a Sega game receives this type of score? Surely it must be a coincidence that the first Sega 9 out of 10 game arrives on a Nintendo machine, despite not being the very best game it's released to date.

Mark Hirst, via email

Sorry to hear you didn't appreciate *Luigi Mansion*'s finer points: if you stick with it, you might be pleasantly surprised at just how much depth and variety this game has to offer. Sega received a 9 out of 10 for *Phantasy Star Online*; *Virtua Tennis* scored 8, as did *JSR* – neither of which are quite as entertaining as *Super Monkey Ball*.

After having read issue **E**102's Frontend, I almost feel sorry for Seamus Blackley and the rest of team Xbox. They have assembled the highest number of quality launch titles ever, put together a powerful piece of hardware (with hard drive and four joypad ports) and created what at least looks like a fine joypad (six buttons – yes, I still play *Street Fighter*). Yet for some reason the specialist press and gaming forums seem content with putting Microsoft down, instead of putting the emphasis on all the great things they are doing. Even **Edge**, the highest order of videogame journalism, could be considered guilty of this.

Consider for example issue **E**94's Frontend, where **Edge** accuses the Xbox controller of having "diluted the purity of the console aesthetic with an element of PC-style over-complication". Xbox has a more simplified input device than PS2. The criticism is uncalled for.

I'm not pointing fingers at **Edge** or any other magazine, merely trying to illustrate how overly critical us hardcore gamers have become of late. We know that gaming is a business. We've had our fingers burned many times. We have a right to be critical. But am I the only one who feels that Microsoft has gone over and beyond the call of duty in trying to secure great launch titles and consumer trust?

Michael Melcher, via email

Certainly, Microsoft has made every effort to create a plausible contender in the next-generation console war. But, as you suggest, let's not forget its motives: Microsoft isn't doing this as part of some grand philanthropic gesture; it's in it to make money and – ultimately – dominate the field of electronic entertainment, which is a factor we should all be aware of. **Edge**, and every potential Xbox customer, has a right to be critical.

Reading Andrew Hatcher's letter (**E**103) left me feeling somewhat alienated. As a committed gamer and early adopter since the early '80s, one would think my label would be undoubtedly 'hardcore'. It certainly wouldn't be

'We have a right to be critical, but am I the only one who feels that Microsoft has gone beyond the call of duty in trying to secure great launch titles and consumer trust?'



Requiring possibly months of play, biting off *Majora's Mask* might be more than some gamers can chew – Malcolm Laurie included

'casual', considering the obscene amount of home game consoles and arcade PCBs I've amassed over the years.

Being now 30-something, videogames are still a very important part of my life. I'd be totally lost if I couldn't talk, read about, or buy games any more. But what I don't do an awful lot is play them for 20+ hours on end. This is something I see mirrored by the creatives featured in interviews in **Edge**, and indeed by many of my friends.

I've bought *Shenmue*, *Zelda 64*, *Final Fantasy*, *Resident Evil*. I've not finished any of them – barely scratched the surface, in fact. There simply isn't enough time to play them, unless you're still attending school, no matter how good they may be. People like me have jobs or businesses, families, places to go, things to do. At most, I can muster around two-to-three hours' free time a week for gameplaying. At this rate, I'll be six months completing *Majora's Mask* – and that's just not going to happen given the other great games vying for my attention.

As a result, I no longer play PC games, leave the sweeping sagas on the shelf, and avoid anything that hints at 40+ hours of gameplay. I want to play as many games as possible with as much concentrated fun as I can in my allotted two-to-three hours. This means arcade games, twitch games – and, in particular, the much-maligned scrolling shoot 'em up.

These games can provide a massively concentrated dose of intense enjoyment in only five minutes. Anyone who has played Cave's *Dangun Feveron* will attest to the sheer exhilaration of a mere three-minutes' play. These sort of titles, including the sorely-missed 2D action platformer, were abundant in the 16bit era, but have no place in the line-ups of today's consoles. Twitch gaming does not necessarily equal retrogaming. A look through the recent offerings of Cave, Raizing, Takumi and Psikyo reveals powerful sprite engines throwing about masses of graphics, with finely tuned accurate gameplay, impressive hand-drawn art, clever secrets and bonus structures, and punchy arcade-style chip tunes. It's definitely time for an **Edge** feature on the few but dedicated producers of genuine twitch gaming.

I think the market is ready for a resurgence in what I call 'classic gamestyles'. These involve something called 'skill', and feature simple controls and accuracy, panicky excitement, high-scoring, soaring heart-rates, all carefully packaged in up-to-date audiovisuals which can be fully enjoyed in less time than it takes to reboot my crashed PC. All the things which made '80s arcade games fun, in fact, and which have been gradually phased out of all the modern bloated gamestyles in favour of more instant hits. The clichéd 'less equals more' adage has never been so relevant.

Andrew, please don't mistake the lack of time I choose to spend on my favourite games as a sign of a casual gamer. If today's systems and games demand a time investment far greater than I can allocate, even though I may have the means to buy them all, I won't necessarily feel the pressing need to.

Malcolm Laurie, via email

I am exclusively happy to read **Edge**, because it is the caviar of gaming magazines. Only one thing has upset me: why do you have those annoying gaming jobs adverts? This is a games magazine, not a Job Centre.

Karen Mclaughlin, via email

The recruitment section of **Edge** serves a valid and useful purpose for all its readers. Not only does it help companies seek out raw new talent, but paid-for advertising also helps fund the continued existence of the magazine. We can only suggest that – assuming you're not interested in finding a job in the industry – you simply don't read them.

'I think the market is ready for a resurgence of what I call "classic gamestyles"...all the things which made '80s arcade games great'

From the forum

A selection of choice cuts from Edge-Online's discussion outlet

Topic: **Develop Magazine**
Poster: **welsh**
As per usual, I don't 'get' most of it and I feel like the tramp who looks on forlornly through the restaurant window. But you have to buy this month's issue purely to see a photo of Miyamoto looking like a turtle-necked jazz-meister, like someone's Uncle at Xmas. It looks like he's out on the pull.

Topic: **Develop Magazine**
Poster: **Zy**
I made a comment about this after the *Zelda* footage, but everyone was too wrapped up in Link's new look instead. At the presentation, he was wearing a silver-grey two-piece and had lost the bowl-cut, as if Lowri Turner had given him a makeover.

Topic: **From the Forum**
Poster: **DC-07**
I think **Edge** should do a feature (possibly for the Xmas issue) on the forum. To be honest, it's a better read than the magazine itself. Highlights of thecleanser's thread – among others – deserve to be aired to the world. A year in the life of the forum would be a nice read over the festive period.

Topic: **For the love of God kill the scores**
Poster: **Kensei**
This forum is still filled with idiots saying '7/10? die **Edge** die!'. Everyone around here is banging on about how games are art. Well, how many art critics do you see going 'Oh, that Mona Lisa, must be worth, oh, 8/10'.

Topic: **For the love of God kill the scores**
Poster: **Baz**
To be honest, I think **Edge** should be more progressive and start marking games as a percentage like all the best magazines. How else are we to know which is better out of two 9/10 games?

Next month



Xbox has landed. **Edge** passes its verdict on the world's most powerful console: hardware and software




Biohazard (GC)
page 034


Nezmix: Have a Mice Day (Xbox)
page 042


Soul Calibur 2 (coin-op)
page 046


Ico (PS2)
page 080


Cosmic Smash (DC)
page 083



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